VACAVILLE

THE HERITAGE OF A CALIFORNIA COMMUNITY

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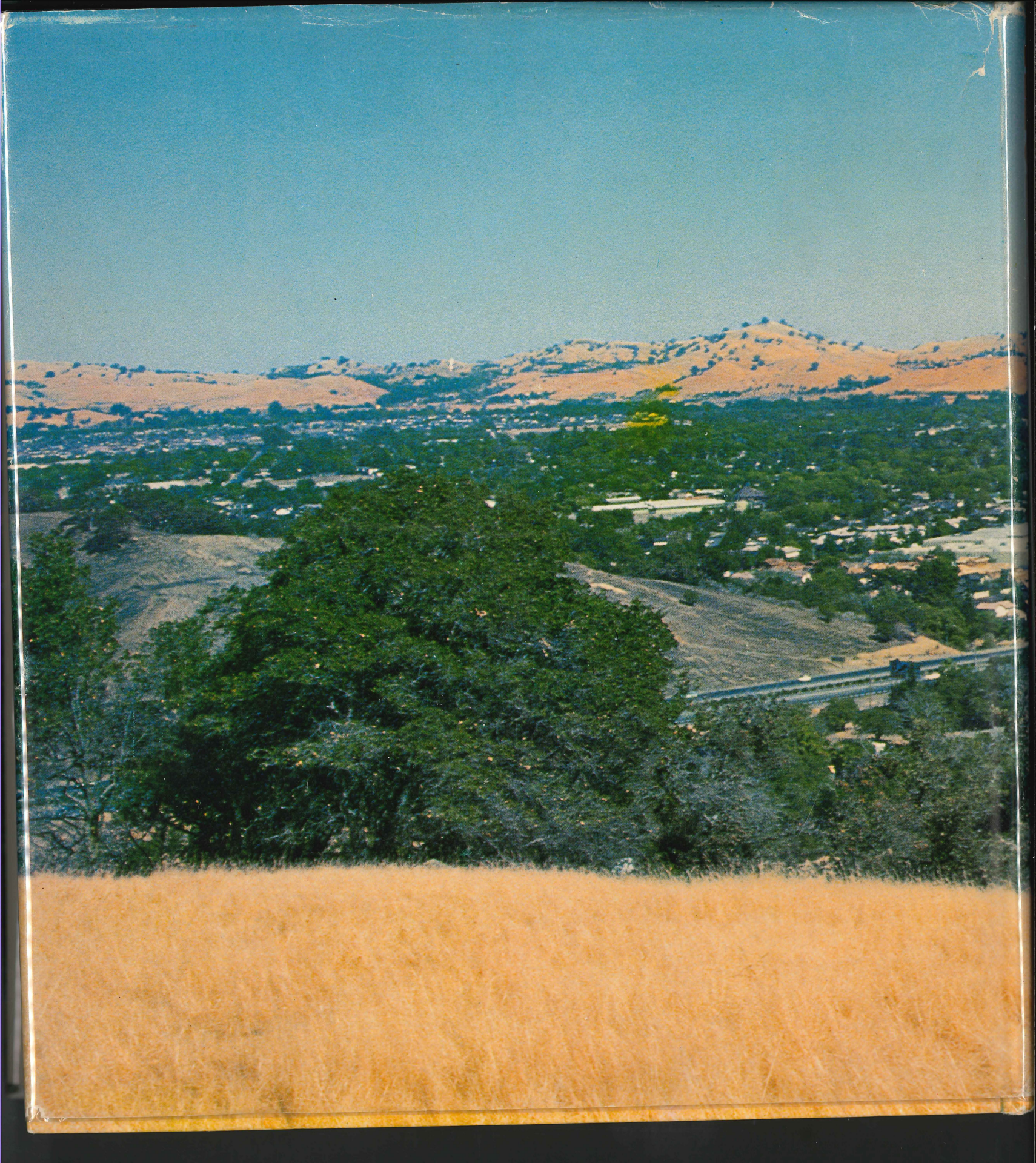

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Ronald H. Limbaugh
Walter A. Payne

Vacaville City Council

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Contents

PART ONE

The Vacaville Area before 1851

The Face of the Land 2
Native People of the Valleys 5
The Rise of the Mexican Rancho 14
North American Pioneers 25

PART TWO

The Rise of the Town, 1851–1880

Taming the Land 30
Setting up a Government 36
The Search for Commercial Production 44
Social Life in Town and Township 72
Pioneers in an Age of Progress 97

PART THREE

The Golden Age, 1880–1918

Growth and Development of the Fresh Fruit Industry 104
The Labor Issue 128
Vacaville's Railroad Era 142
Business Growth in the Formative Years 152
Incorporation and Public Services 163
Growth of Vacaville Society 178
Fighting Demon Rum 202

PART FOUR

Between the Wars, 1918–1940

The Twenties in Vacaville 212
The Decline of Fruit Culture, 1920–1940 233
The Social Impact of the Depression 248

PART FIVE

Modern Vacaville

Vacaville in World War II 264
Vacaville Today: Postwar Growth and Transformation 280

Reference Sources 307
Illustration Sources 312
Name Index 314
Subject Index 320

PREFACE

This project is an outgrowth of the desire of the Vacaville City Council to leave a lasting contribution to the people of the community as part of the national 1976 bicentennial celebrations. The authors, professors at the University of the Pacific, Stockton, began work on the project in the fall of 1976. They wish to express their appreciation for the generous cooperation and assistance of the following individuals and institutions who contributed to the development of this project.

Members of the Vacaville History Advisory Committee—Robert Allen, Walter V. Graham, Jane LoPolito, Robert Power, Richard Rico, and Grady Zimmerman—met frequently with the authors and made many helpful contributions that shaped the project from its inception to the final decisions relating to publication. In addition, active members of the Vacaville Heritage Council, especially Robert Allen, Bill Churchill, Mildred Conn, Bert Hughes, Jane LoPolito, Judy Lopez, Eleanor Nelson, and Helen Stephenson, helped initiate the project with suggestions about local resources and persons to be interviewed.

In locating background information and resources, assistance was volunteered by many librarians and archivists. Special thanks go to David F. Myrick, former archivist of the Southern Pacific Railroad; John Donofrio, associate archivist of the Bank of America; Donald Kunitz and Kate Siefra of the Special Collections Library, University of California, Davis; Joann L. Larkey, University of California, Davis, Oral History Project interviewer; Arthur W. Swann, University of the Pacific,

archivist of the J.A.B. Fry Library; G. Malcolm Reynolds and Richard G. Brownell, librarians at the Fairfield–Suisun Community Library; Yvonne Alcantara of the Vacaville Public Library; Dr. Myra Ellen Jenkins of the New Mexico State Records Center and Archives, Santa Fe; and Dr. William N. Davis, California State Archivist.

Many individuals contributed a great deal to the project with their assistance. Eleanor Nelson contacted old-timers and arranged most of the Vacaville interviews. Robert Allen labored untold hours to reproduce most of the photographs used in the book and was a constant source of constructive criticism and advice. Corinne Grannen, Vacaville City Clerk, helped locate city records. Professor Gunther Barth of the University of California, Berkeley, reviewed the labor history chapter, and David Myrick read the railroad chapter. Robert Power provided many useful leads and made available his own extensive historical resources. Edwin H. Uhl, J. Howard Rogers, and Carroll Mundy each reviewed selected chapters and offered suggestions that were incorporated in the text. At the University of the Pacific, Louise Sasenbery was a constant source of help in the history department. Narcissa Peña arranged meetings with her family at Davis, and Audrey Methvin of Woodland was a great help in bringing about meetings with descendants of the Vaca family. Finally, wives of authors earn the right to be recognized for their close relationship to the preparation of a book manuscript. In this case, Margaret Payne and Marilyn Limbaugh were both patient and understanding.

The magnitude of the project made it advisable to divide the writing responsibilities. Walter A. Payne, director of the Holt-Atherton Pacific Center for Western Studies and chairman of the History Department, wrote Parts One and Two, and portions of the final chapter in Part Five. Ronald H. Limbaugh, archivist of the Holt-Atherton Pacific Center and professor of history, wrote Parts Three and Four, and much of Part Five. Each author consulted, reviewed, and edited the entire manuscript, and they are responsible for errors or omissions.

As this project has unfolded , the authors have been constantly impressed by the vitality of the historical experience in Vacaville and by the warmth and generosity of the people that live there. It is our hope that the publication of this book will provide stimulating reading for all and will lay the foundation for further study of the community's rich heritage.

Holt-Atherton Pacific Center for Western Studies
University of the Pacific, Stockton

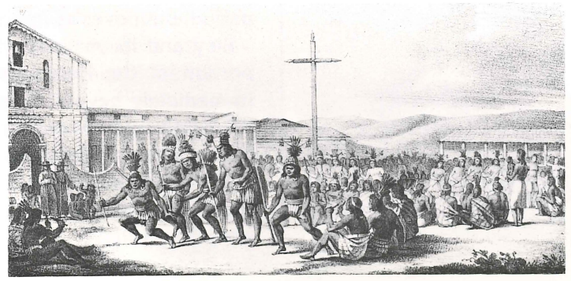
Juan Manuel Vaca

PART ONE

The Vacaville Area Before 1851

In 1850 the New Mexican pioneer, Juan Manuel Vaca, decided to sell a nine square mile plot of land from his Los Putos rancho to William McDaniel, a rancher and land developer. As part of the deed of sale, they agreed that McDaniel would lay out a town to be called "Vacaville" on any one square mile of the land being sold and that Vaca would be deeded a large number of lots in the town named after him. On December 13, 1851, the town had been surveyed and a **Mapa de la Villa de Vacaville, Estado de California** was filed with Solano County officials.

McDaniel had built the town's first structure in 1850, and this was followed by another building used as a hotel and a third building used as a store. These were the modest beginnings of the town located on Ulatis Creek where the stage-coaches crossed the stream on their way from the Robert Semple ferry at Benicia to Sacramento. Like many other places in the new State of California, the growth of Vacaville was preceded by interesting historical events involving people who had inhabited the land before Americans took possession after the Mexican War.



The Face of the Land

Vaca Valley is the southern part of a long trough extending northward to Putah Creek, with the English Hills rising to the east and the Vaca Mountains to the west. Vaca Valley itself runs nine miles northward and includes Ulatis Creek on the east and Alamo Creek on the west. After a low divide at its northernmost point, it shares the interrange trough with Pleasants Valley, which is drained by Pleasants Creek and runs six miles further north to Putah Creek. A third basin, lying to the west and south of Vaca Valley, is tiny Laguna Valley. It extends four and a half miles north and south and is bisected by Laguna Creek. These three valleys have been closely associated in the history of Vacaville since the 1850s, and they also had much in common in the history of the region before that time.

The terrain in adjacent areas includes Green Valley and Suisun Valley. Suisun Valley is a broad plain that reaches south to Suisun Bay, and by way of that waterway gains access through Carquinez Strait to San Francisco Bay along the only significant break in the Coast Range. This coastal access made Suisun Valley an important neighbor for Vaca, Laguna, and Pleasants valleys. Green Valley was an important neighbor in the American period, but never as important as Suisun Valley and its main towns. Finally, that portion of the Putah Creek beginning immediately beyond Pleasants Valley in the north was always a natural link between Solano and northern California, as well as Sacramento.

In this general area of low hills and attractive valleys, nature has provided

bountiful conditions for the development of human societies. The floors of the Vaca and Pleasants valleys are particularly endowed with recent alluvial deposits of sandy and silty soils that vary from ten to forty feet in depth. With rich nutrients, good penetration of roots, and excellent water drainage, these soils are comparable to the best in the state and capable of great production of grains, vegetables, and fruit. Laguna Valley, which has a high water level and winter flooding, has been used mainly for livestock production.

Upland soils cover the largest area of the land above the valley floors. They are often shallow soils vulnerable to erosion, and this factor has limited their use for agriculture. On these soils grow chaparral and grasslands, and where fairly fertile soils are found here and there, they support the cultivation of vineyards and orchards. An older alluvial soil is found in nearby lands, and it is most useful for maintaining pasturage and growing wheat.

The valley climate, like the land surface, contributes a combination of conditions that benefit agricultural and horticultural production. The climate is designated Mediterranean, or dry summer subtropical, and the mountains and seacoast to the west contribute to a growing year that has adequate rainfall without irrigation; short, cool winters with ample rain; early plant growth in the spring; and warm, productive summers. The nearby coastal mountains are high enough to protect the valleys most years from wind damage and the harmful drying of crops, and the English Hills and Vaca Mountains protect against the cold north winds in the winter, leaving parts of the valleys and uplands warm and capable of producing early-blooming orchards in the spring. The English Hills also have warmer soils, which aids the early blooming of fruit trees. Even during the brief winters, vegetables and fruit plants continue to grow. All of these factors give the area a unique advantage in supplying adjacent and even far-removed commercial markets with produce. Of course nature has not always dealt ideally with the area, and history records that in a few years there has been

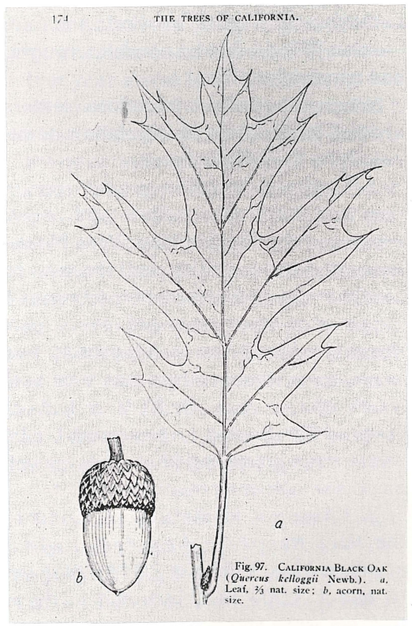
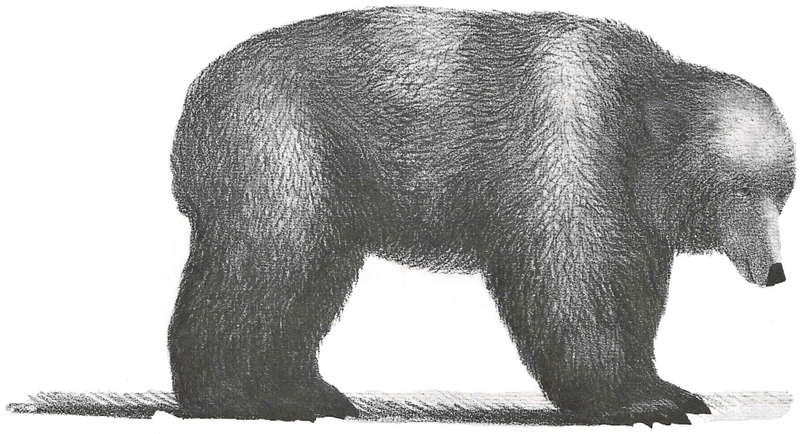


Fig. 97. California Black Oak (*Quercus kelloggii* Newb.). *a*, Leaf, ⅓ nat. size; *b*, acorn, nat. size.



excessive destruction by winds and rain, erosion, floods, frost, snowfall, drought, and wind-driven fires.

When the earliest American settlers arrived, three kinds of vegetation dominated the three-valley area.

1. Oak woodlands in great variety—blue oak, black oak, and interior live oak—covered the English Hills, Vaca Mountains, and the lower slopes. There were also alder, buckeye, mountain laurel, and digger pine trees amongst others, particularly in the denser wooded areas near the creeks where water was available much of the year. Herbs and grasses covered the ground, including wild oats, western rye grass, and blue grass, as well as poison oak and cream brush.

2. Chaparral thickets were found in the Vaca Mountains from their highest point on Mount Vaca at 2,819 feet down to about 1,500 feet. Included in these thickets were scrub oaks, coyote brush, manzanita, and fields of chamise that made a tangled, impenetrable brush on the higher slopes.

3. Finally, the valley bottoms and the English Hills were covered with valley oak trees and grasslands.

In the midst of this rich soil, moderate climate, ample water resources, and verdant valleys and woodlands, there flourished a variety of large and small game animals, water fowl, rodents, fish, and insects. Among the more important were the grizzly bear, deer, tule elk, antelope, geese, and salmon. All these resources amply supported human and animal life in the various periods of human occupation from Indians to Mexican settlers to American herders and growers. The interesting thing is how each succeeding people—the Indian, the Mexican, and the Anglo-American—using basically the same resources, built its own, quite different, way of life.

Native People of the Valleys

It is interesting that American recollections of the earliest days at Vacaville do not once mention the presence of Indians in the vicinity. It is known from descendants of Juan Manuel Vaca and Juan Felipe Peña that mission-trained natives still lived and worked stock and built buildings for those families. None the less, they seemed not to be part of that luxuriant, open, inviting land. The reasons for the absence of Indians can be explained fairly conclusively, although a great deal of investigation is still needed on the earliest peoples down to about the late 1840s.

The Patwin Indian Experience. As early as 1837, the Southern Patwin Indians of the Wintun culture group might still have been in evidence to travelers. However, in that year a smallpox epidemic spread from Sonoma to the nearby areas, and it left less than about one hundred Indians in the general Southern Patwin area from Suisun Bay northward to the Putah Creek. This exposure to death by European disease was only the last in a series of events that nearly eliminated the Indians from the Suisun, Green, Laguna, Vaca, and Pleasants valleys between their initial contact with Spaniards in the year 1810 and the final epidemic disaster of 1837 to 1839. It was just a little more than a quarter of a century, but the consequences of European contact were disastrous.

The adaptation of the Southern Patwin in the three valleys of most interest to this account was a primitive, simple, and natural relation to the land, vegetation, and animal life found there. Living south

of Cache Creek (in what was later to be Yolo County), the Southern Patwin gathered in small villages along the valley floors of the foothills and valleys extending south to Suisun Bay. These villages were permanent concentrations of perhaps two hundred or more men, women, and children, and they typically grew up around buildings designed to satisfy two different needs: shelter and society.

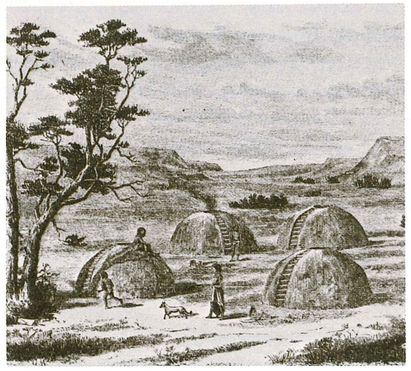
A dwelling house was built for two families or more, each family having a fixed portion of the space for itself. The dwelling was built over an elliptical pit three to four feet deep and up to thirty feet in diameter. The floor was leveled, and earth was piled around the pit to give the dwelling a total depth of about six feet. To complete the house, the Indians constructed an arched roof made of wooden beams and packed earth over walls formed of brush thatchwood. They left a single entrance and a place for smoke to escape from the inside fireplace located at the center of the structure.

There were no planned streets so the family houses were not placed in any particular relation to one another, except that the structure occupied by the chief was normally located in the center of the family huts. During gathering season or fishing season, when families were assigned lands for their use by the chief, they left the village and built temporary brush shelters for the seasonal harvest.

Several kinds of buildings served the village's social needs. A **temescal**, or sweathouse, was in daily use as an assembly place for men; often it was also their sleeping place. It used fire pits and fire for warmth and smoke and was usually located near a stream. Close to the sweathouse, the tribelets often built a ceremonial dance house with an entrance facing the east. Finally, a menstrual house for women in menstruation or child birth was erected across the settlement from the **temescal** and the dance house. These buildings varied in size from the sweathouse, which was forty to fifty feet long, to the dance house, which was slightly larger, and the menstrual house, which was the smallest of all and not more than twenty feet in length.

The Southern Patwin were basically hunters and gatherers. Their basic diet included the deer, elk, antelope, bear, rabbits, small rodents, and insects that were readily available on the valley floors and mountain slopes. Furthermore, the acorn—a staple food for the Patwin, as well as other California Indians—was readily available in the oak woodlands of the Vaca Mountains and vicinity. By traveling to temporary encampments near the Sacramento River some thirty miles away, they could supplement their food supply with rich salmon. Finally, they gathered seeds from trees like the digger pine and buckeye; there were edible roots for the gathering, drying, and storing; and they manufactured an alcoholic drink from manzanita berries. Food collected during the harvest season was stored in granaries at the permanent village for consumption during the winter.

Dome-shaped earth lodges of the Patwins



A *temescal* (sweathouse) afforded a healthful sweat and a cold plunge for the Indians

The availability of a rich and plentiful food supply was basic to the Patwin way of life. Each tribelet had a relatively large tract within which it operated for the maintenance of life. Poaching could bring "war" if one tribelet intruded in another's tribal territory. Otherwise, warfare was at a minimum.

Along with food resources, the valley floors offered water for the Patwin settlers. They naturally chose to locate their villages near the spring-fed creeks that flowed through Vaca and Pleasants valleys the year around and near the lake for which the Spaniards named Laguna Valley.

The Southern Patwin lived off the land and its rich bounty, content with the harvest of the sky, land, and water. In the process, they developed no crop system of their own, and great tracts of land went uninhabited and lightly used.

Many writers have been interested in learning how many Indians lived in the Southern Patwin valleys and plains before the arrival of the Spaniards. However, while modern estimates are useful, the actual number will probably never be

known because the natives of modern Solano County were eliminated decades before trained observers began to investigate their culture in the early twentieth century.

The Southern Patwin area still awaits detailed study of remaining archaeological sites, but the names of larger groups of Indians are mentioned from time to time in early documents in the Spanish and Mexican baptism books in the missions, as well as in several diaries and reports from early expeditions to the tribes. Significant concentrations of Indians lived on Ulatis Creek near the present town of Vacaville, and they are cited in Spanish records as the **Ululatos**, although the name is spelled differently in many sources over the years. A classic work on the **Tribes of California** by Stephen Powers, who visited in the 1870s, notes that in "Lagoon Valley were the Ma-lak-ka. . . ," a tribelet registered in the mission baptism rolls as **Malacas**. Reference is found to the **Libaytos** of the area south of Putah Creek, and missions contain records of the important **Suisunes** of that plain, as well as of the **Tolenas** of the upper Suisun Valley. Living in villages of from two hundred to five hundred persons, the current most recent estimate of Southern Patwin premission population has been set by Sherburne F. Cook in **The Population of the California Indians 1769–1970** (1976) at about 5,000.

Of the Indians removed to the Spanish missions for baptism and confinement at a new permanent location after 1807, the largest single village group recorded was the **Ululatos**. Some 572 were identified

Top left sketch is a Ululato Indian at Mission San Francisco de Asís, 1816

from the baptismal rolls of three separate missions—San Francisco de Asís, San José, and San Francisco Solano. The largest number of baptisms were administered between 1821 and 1822 for the **Ululatos**, but they were removed steadily and in great numbers in a little over a decade during the Spanish occupation of Upper California. In short, only the Wintun Indians who lived north of Putah Creek could be considered to be beyond the reach of the Spanish government and missionization. These Indians alone were able to remain free and continue their indigenous way of life.

Spain and Alta California

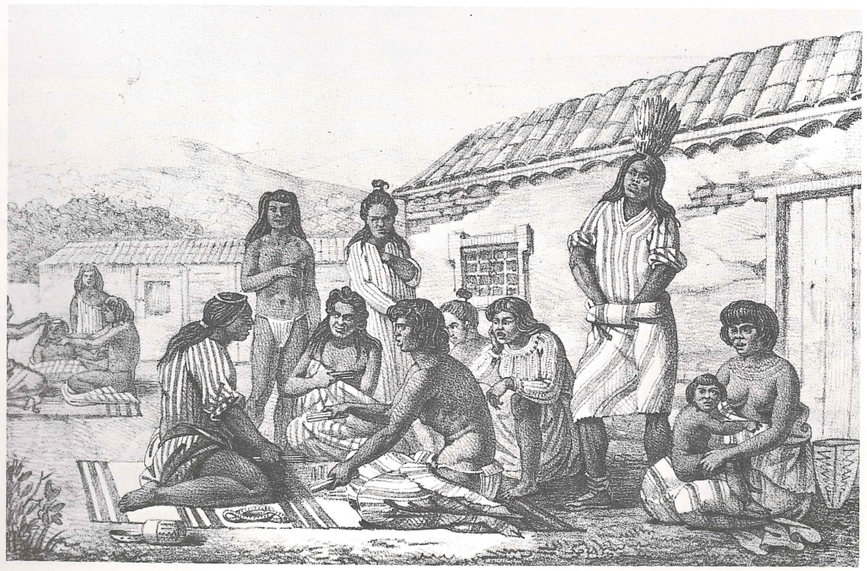
Among the five powerful European kingdoms that held colonies in the Americas, the Spanish monarchy controlled the largest settled regions in the New World following the great discovery by Christopher Columbus. Not until 1769 did the Spanish Crown finally decide to incorporate and settle its most westward and northward borderlands. The coastal areas of both Lower (Baja) and Upper

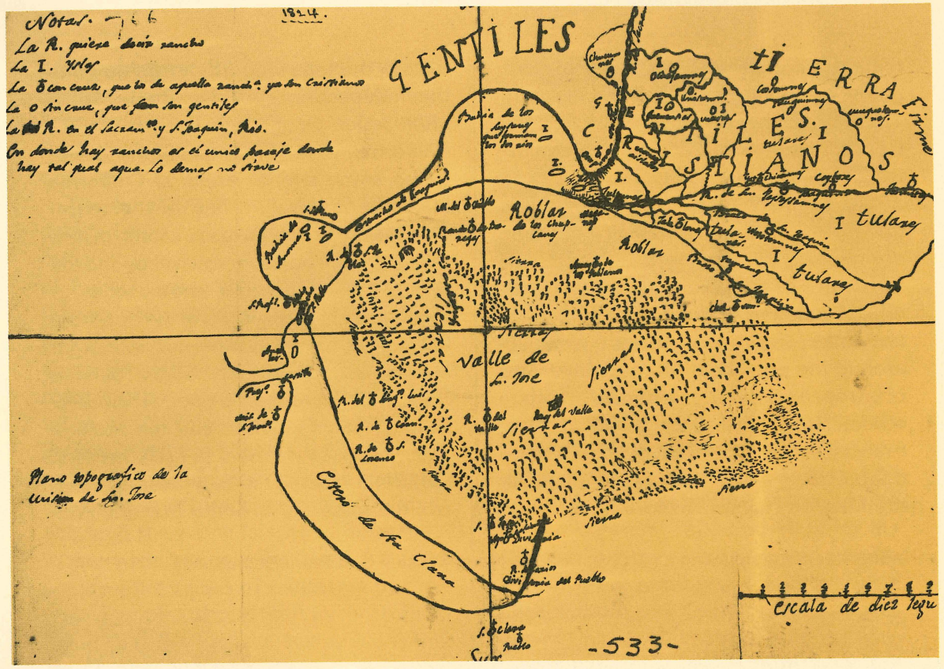
(Alta) California had been known to navigators in the Pacific Ocean from the early 1520s, but the decision to move into Upper California came very late in Spanish New World history.

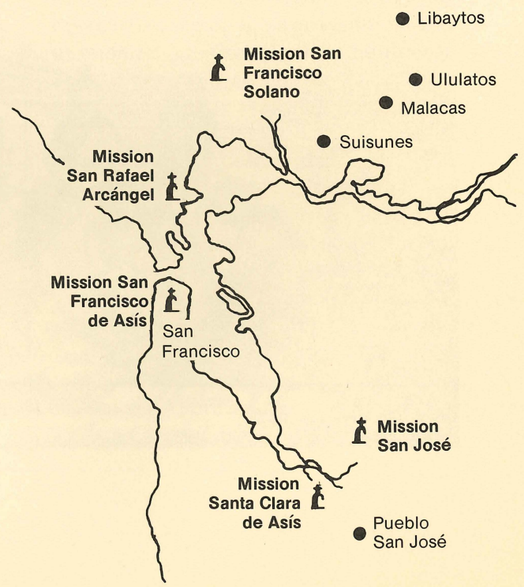
The manner of organizing this occupation is well known. Spain built a number of **presidios** (military ports), Franciscan **misiones** (missions and convents), and official **pueblos** (towns). In addition to the latter, functional towns grew up around the presidios. All these agencies of European civilization extended in a thin coastal strip from San Diego north to San Francisco Bay, with the deepest penetration being about thirty miles inland at the Mission Nuestra Señora de la Soledad. In the following fifty years down to the independence of Mexico in 1821, after which Spain lost control of Alta California, Spanish expeditions penetrated some interior areas of California to the Central Valley, but they were unable to find the resources to establish new missions, presidios, or towns beyond the twenty coastal missions known today.

In this sense, the lands of the Southern Patwin lay on the northernmost margin of Spanish colonization. Spain founded centers of European power at the Presidio of San Francisco and the Mission San Francisco de Asís (1776), the first California pueblo at San José (1777), and the missions at Santa Clara de Asís

Indian neophytes playing a game in the courtyard, Mission San Francisco de Asís, 1816







Father Narciso Durán of Mission San José drew the ancient map that shows the Christian and pagan natives of the San Francisco Bay area in 1824. The modern map notes Indian villages on the northern mission frontier that furnished converts to adjacent mission centers.

(1777), San José de Guadalupe (1797), and San Rafael Arcángel (1817). Each of these settlements supported Spanish control of the land and people in and around the San Francisco Bay. While Spain sought many goals in her occupation of Alta California, the primary objective was political control of the land and, through the Catholic Church and the padres, of native peoples around San Francisco, the northernmost territorial center.

Since the area now named Solano County was beyond the political limits of Spanish policy, the natives living there and in northern California and the Central Valley were mostly untouched by European activities in the early years after 1769. However, due to the Spanish theory of "civilization," the inhabitants of the Southern Patwin area were gradually drawn into the Spanish colonial system in the early 1800s. The result was devastating to the Suisunes, Tolenas, Malacas, Ululatos, and Libaytos, as well as the other tribelets of the area.

When establishing an outpost of empire like that at the Presidio San Francisco, the Spaniards justified the seizure of both the land and the native peoples by the theory that they were creating a Christian "civilization." Such a civilization demanded Spanish political, economic, social, and religious standards as opposed to native Indian practices.

Indians were gathered into town centers to live a permanent existence rather than seminomadic wandering in a free state. They were to learn Spanish, work at trades and crafts, be subjects—well treated, of course—of the Spanish Crown, and, above all else, learn from the Franciscan padres how to live and behave like Christians. In Upper California, this meant living in missions for as long as it was necessary to acquire "civilization." At the missions, which were like towns, they learned to plant and cultivate European crops; work with cattle, horses, sheep, and pigs; irrigate fields; and give up their roaming around.

Natives who remained heathen were called gentiles, which was an old word for pagans. The Southern Patwin were in this group before 1807, but in that year the **Libro de Bautismos** (Book of Baptisms) at the Mission San José first recorded the names of two **Suysun** Indians (as the Spanish wrote the word at that time). This recording marked the first inroads of Spanish civilization on the Southern Patwin tribelets.

Actually, as early as 1794 the Mission San Francisco de Asís asked Governor Diego Borica to authorize expansion to seek new converts and mission sites north of San Francisco Bay. While occupation remained centered at San Francisco and the request to expand was denied in 1795, the very fact that the request was made showed that the church was concerned with the desire to spread out into new gentile lands. From the study of newly baptized Indians in the 1790s on parts of the frontier, it appears that the incorporation of new heathens slowly began to take place without crown authorization.

During the decade from 1800 to 1810, records involving the missions at San

Francisco de Asís, Santa Clara, and San José show increasing hostility toward gentiles and new expeditions on the periphery of nonmission lands. These expeditions were aimed at seeking new mission sites in the hope of expansion, but they were also punitive when they sought to punish pagan actions against the missions, to recover stolen Spanish stock, and to recapture **cimarrones** (runaway neophytes). One by-product was the capture and removal of new converts to the missions for baptism.

The earlier missions had worked earnestly to convert and train Indians, but in this later period voluntary conversion seemed to be changing to out-and-out punishment and subjugation of "gentile" Indians within raiding distance of the missions. Without expansion of missions, new field systems, and related development, this was like a defensive policing action rather than the earlier "civilizing" goals, and it emphasized removal and punishment rather than any creative relationship between European and Indian peoples. This fact is clearly illustrated by what happened to the Southern Patwin in the following decade.

Starting about 1807, the Suisun tribelet raided neophytes of the San Francisco de Asís and San José missions, and warlike activity, including the killing of Christians, continued until 1810. The Spanish authorities then sent Lieutenant Gabriel Moraga with seventeen soldiers from San Francisco Presidio to punish this action. The soldiers were ferried across the Carquinez Strait, and then proceeded to the village of the unconverted Suisuns near the northern end of the Suisun marshland. Moraga and his men killed 125 warriors, a very large battle by comparison to others that Spain had had in her northern borderland frontiers. It was also a fateful beginning of Spanish penetration against the Southern Patwin.

In 1811 an expedition headed by Sergeant José Antonio Sánchez was sent to explore the Sacramento River. On the return trip this party reached the vicinity of what is now Suisun Bay on October 28, and they followed up the Spanish contact made the previous year by Moraga. They encountered fifty Indians from two Southern Patwin groups: the Suisuns and the Malacas of the Laguna Valley. Father Ramón Abella recorded this in his diary of the trip as follows:

> We sent four neophytes from the San Francisco Mission, natives of this area, to locate their countrymen, and fifty men from two villages presented themselves, all unarmed.... The villages are called Malaca and Suisun. According to what the Indians said, the latter is divided into three parts. They claimed that it was quite close, but according to the signs between here and the shore somewhat less than two leagues away; a short time ago they were living on the shore. That was where Lieutenant Gabriel Moraga struck them the blow.

Father Abella continued by observing that the Indians were very frightened, but they remained at their villages. This interesting diary was the last report by an expedition until ten years later, but it clearly showed that the missionization of the Southern Patwin had begun.

By this time, Spain had exhausted her ability to expand to new sites and open new missions to house outlying tribes. Instead the books of baptisms of the San Francisco de Asís and San José missions record a growing number of baptisms of Indians from this same region in the years up to 1821. It is presumed that the Indians were brought to the established missions by small parties of soldiers or by Indian neophytes during trips to the area. For example, two Suisun baptisms appeared at San José in 1807 and twenty-three more in 1810. At least four neophytes were at San Francisco by 1811, and smaller numbers followed year after year. In 1812, along with a small number of names of Suisuns, there appeared one Ululato from Vaca Valley. Then, in 1816, 1817, and 1819, baptisms of many names of Malacas, Ululatos, and Tolenas were recorded, as the Spanish drove deeper into the Solano region.

The third and final recorded expedition to the Suisun area took place in 1821, the final year of Spanish rule in California. The unusually large party, led by Lieutenant Luis Argüello and Father Blas Ordaz, included fifty-nine soldiers. Basically, it was a military reconnaissance to determine whether foreigners were in the area forty or fifty leagues north of San Francisco. Argüello crossed the Sacramento River at Carquinez Strait, passed through the Suisun **ranchería** (Indian settlement), marched on to that of the Ululatos and then to the Libaytos on Putah Creek (the Spaniards called it San Pedro Creek).

While it is clear that the purpose of the march was military, it is interesting to note that the baptismal records of the Mission San Francisco de Asís showed at least two hundred and fifty-four Ululatos being added to that center in the same year of 1821. That was the greatest number of converts in any year to that time; missionization had reached its peak.

The story of Spanish penetration and action in Solano County and in Laguna and Vaca valleys was a record of swift and destructive treatment of the native people. Far from "civilizing" them the Spaniards succeeded only in removing them and their culture and leaving the land empty of human occupation. Spain took away without giving anything in return; its policy and practice were disastrous for the earliest inhabitants.

The Rise of the Mexican Rancho

Mariano Guadalupe Vallejo

Apart from sending a few expeditions to the area Spain contributed nothing to colonizing the land that came to be included in Solano County after its creation as one of the original twenty-seven California counties in 1850. The main plains and valleys like Suisun, Laguna, and Vaca actually began to be developed as part of the District of Sonoma during the period when California was a province of the Republic of Mexico after 1821.

The only mission established in Upper California under Mexico was founded by the Spanish-born priest, Fray José Altimira. He traveled to San Rafael, Petaluma, Sonoma, Napa, and Suisun Valley looking for a suitable site for a mission to replace Mission San Francisco de Asís, which had harsh weather and unhealthful conditions for converts. He built the Mission San Francisco de Solano at Sonoma in 1823, and that mission became a focal point for Mexican occupation of the north San Francisco Bay region. When the mission was returned to civil control in 1835, Mexican border forces continued to determine the fate of the area under the direction of Lieutenant Mariano Guadalupe Vallejo, who established a presidio and pueblo at Sonoma in June of that year.

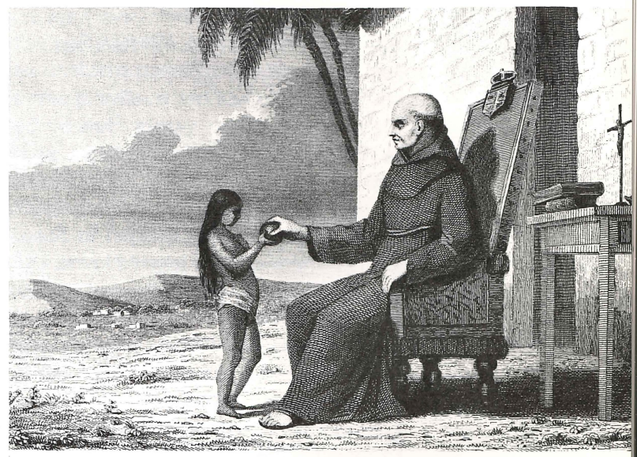
Vallejo was authorized to free the Indian neophytes from confinement at the Mission Solano and to supply them with plots of land, tools, animals, and food, all of which was aimed at making them independent citizens of the area. The Indians either drifted back to the outlying wilds or, in some cases, remained or returned to work on the lands or manage

the herds of Commander Vallejo. New settlers arrived, and Vallejo was instructed to grant lands for the purpose of developing the area and bringing it into effective use for Mexico. The lands went mainly to Mexican citizens, and the town of Sonoma grew up as a buffer against the Russian presence at Fort Ross on the northern frontier. One important result after 1835 was that the use and holding of valley lands clearly shifted from Indian to Mexican hands.

By that time, the Southern Patwin Indians had declined greatly in numbers because they were removed to missions or fled rather than be converted. In fact, during Father Altimira's expedition to seek a new site for a mission in 1823, he sent five neophytes to the Ululatos ranchería to seek the return of **cimarrones**. They reported that the Vaca Valley site was deserted except for thirty gentiles. When the Mexican force moved northward to the Libaytos ranchería south of Putah Creek, there were only fifty Indians there, the remainder being absent gathering seeds.

Father Altimira was told the following story by the Libaytos:

> Seven days ago there came here an Indian from San José called Ildefonso with many mission Indians armed with bows, spears, and 2 guns, saying that they had come to hunt fugitives. They went to Ululatos and the Indian Ildefonso told them that they must come to San José and be made Christians, the Father Narciso [Durán] was summoning them, and if they did not respond, the Father from San Francisco would come to get them, and they would suffer much because they would be severely chastised. The Ululatos, Christians and gentiles, resisted, saying they did not want to, whereupon they [the San José Indians] held them [the Ululatos] up, robbed them, and beat them. We [the Libaytos] being afraid, ran away and escaped. . . .



Father Narciso Durán of Mission San José, from an engraving in Eugène Duflot de Mofras' *Exploration* (1844). Durán labored from 1806 to 1833, erecting mission buildings, managing rich vineyards and herds of cattle, horses, and sheep, and becoming the leader in musical instruction for Indians at the California missions. Many of his neophytes came from the Vacaville area.

The account continued to explain that the Ululatos, Suisunes, and the Christian and gentile Indians after a time unbound each other and set out for the tulares to escape into isolated lands.

Sherburne Cook reported that at least 2,050 Southern Patwin baptisms had been recorded, with San Francisco de

Asís taking 973 and Solano baptizing 921 by the year 1834. Mission San José had the remainder, a much smaller number than the other two missions, and all these Indians came from Suisun Bay north to Putah Creek, including Laguna and Vaca Valleys. About one hundred Indians lived at the Rancho Santa Eulalia (later called Rancho Suisun) in Suisun Valley, where after its foundation in 1824 out of Mission Sonoma, Mexico was able to use the land and these few inhabitants to plant fields of wheat, barley, beans, maize, frijoles, and garbanzos (chickpeas). Horses, mules, cattle, sheep, and pigs were introduced, and Mexico began to develop the area along modest lines. Since this kind of settlement was what the original Spanish missionaries had sought to achieve as a step to "civilization," it seems ironic that it came so little, so late, and under Mexico, not Spain.

By 1837, one final tragedy struck the small number of the surviving Southern Patwin. In that year, Commander Vallejo ordered Ignacio Miramontes, a Mexican corporal of cavalry, to travel north from Sonoma with Indian carriers to bring back a cargo of cloth and leather goods from Fort Ross. It is not known how it happened, but they also brought back smallpox, which spread rapidly from Sonoma into adjacent northern California as far as the slopes of Mount Shasta. Mission Indians sickened and died in great numbers, and whole populations of nonmission Indians were annihilated in the gentile lands. Only persons who had previous immunity or had been vaccinated like Miramontes, lived through the "Miramontes Epidemic" of 1837 to 1839.

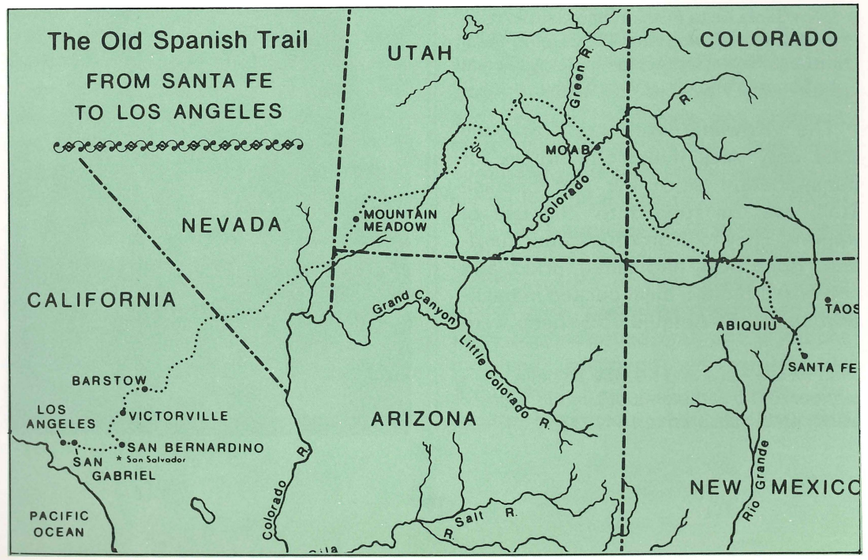
In later years, careful attempts to determine Indian population estimated that only 200 of the Southern Patwin survived by 1852. When the American immigrants reached Vaca Valley in the spring of 1852, they understandably found a land empty of Indians and pretty much empty of other human habitation.

One exception to this decline of Indian occupation of the land was found in the case of the Suisun Chief Francisco Solano (Sen-Yeto), for whom the county was named. In 1837 Chief Solano was granted four square leagues in the Valley of the Suisuns, his birthplace. The land had been included earlier in the Rancho Santa Eulalia. The grant was final by 1842, and the area took the name of Rancho Suisun. However, Mariano Guadalupe Vallejo purchased the rancho from Solano in the same year, and Vallejo continued the ranching operation until he sold it in 1850 to Archibald A. Ritchie. Solano and his people left the area in 1846, supposedly going into the northern country to avoid contact with Mexican and American society.

Following the impact of secularization and the destruction of natives by disease, the first serious attempt to develop the lands in present-day Solano County was begun through the granting of lands for ranchos. In the 1840s, four families established large stock ranches. José Armijo, a New Mexico trader, was granted the Rancho Tolenas in northeastern Suisun Valley in 1840, and he occupied the land in 1841 by erecting a temporary home from which he ran a cattle operation while growing corn, vegetables, and fruit for his own use. He was followed by two other families from New Mexico, those of Juan Manuel Vaca and his partner, Juan Felipe Peña, who probably reached the area named Vaca Valley as early as December 1841. By June 6, 1842, Vaca and his immigrant families had met the requirement of building houses and they petitioned for a land grant of ten square leagues for the place called "Lihuaytos," near the lake in Laguna Valley. Finally, in July 1842, a Santa Fe trader, John Wolfskill, reached the Putah Creek area with a band of horses. By September he had built a cabin on the Río de los Putos Rancho. The grant had been given the previous year to his brother, William Wolfskill, an established Mexican citizen of the Los Angeles area. These four families, along with the Rancho Suisun of Vallejo, were the initial occupants of the plain and northern valleys and foothills.

The Vaca family, and presumably the Peña family, had traveled from New Mexico to California seeking new homes in a new land. Along with about twenty-five men, mostly North Americans, but including New Mexicans of Spanish and Indian descent, the Rowland-Workman party, which included the Vaca and Peña families, set out from a little frontier pueblo called Abiquiú, west of Santa Fe on the Chama River. (Pack horse traders had to wait at this town to get permission to travel and trade in California, which was another province of Mexico.) The party was led by John Rowland and William Workman, and it departed on September 6, 1841, on the Old Spanish Trail. It was the first overland party on

New Mexicans traded silver and American goods for horses, mules, and China silk

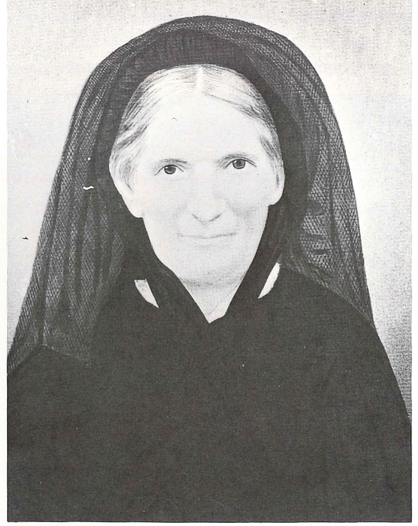


the trail that sought permanent homes in California. Other reasons for departing New Mexico were the frontier Indian invasions by Comanches, Apaches, and Utes, and, in the case of the Americans, the distrust and political intrigue of the Republic of Texas, which reportedly sought to add New Mexico to Texas.

Juan Manuel Vaca, whose wife, María Dolores Bernal, had died about 1839, brought his eight living children. Juan Felipe Peña brought his wife, Isabella Gonsalves and their six children. Family tradition recalls the journey, as quoted from historian Wood Young:

> Nestora Peña (only daughter of Juan Felipe) was told that at age three, she was carried at times by her father on a pillow on his horse, and the cacti was in bloom all across the deserts. This was substantiated by a further family tradition . . . [that] told of Appolonia Vaca, two-year-old daughter of Juan Manuel, riding in a balanced saddle bag opposite Nestora Peña on a gentle mule. And that, they came from Santa Fe to Mission San Gabriel (Los Angeles) followed the El Camino Real through Santa Barbara to Monterey, thence to Sonoma and on to Vaca Valley.

The Rowland-Workman company used only pack mules and horses for transportation since the Old Spanish Trail was too rugged for the use of wagons. They took groceries; flour; hardtack; dried beef; and salted, dried, and pulverized buffalo meat packed in buckskin sacks. At Abiquiú 150 sheep were

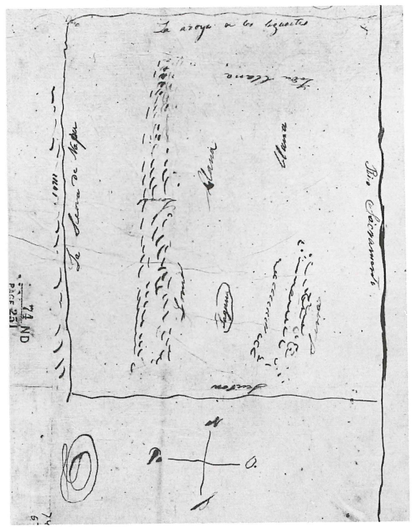


Juan Felipe Peña and his wife Isabella pioneered the settlement of Lagoon Valley with their six children in 1841–42

The plaza at Sonoma about 1850. Mariano Guadalupe Vallejo commanded this important center for the early New Mexican settlers at "Lihuaytos," or Los Putos

purchased to be driven and used for fresh meat. There were also fish and game to be had along the way. Their route took them through good land for grass and water, although at times the land was desolate. The Mojave Desert was a real trial, with drifting sands and hard soils that destroyed tracks, so the party followed the carcasses of horses that had died in earlier attempts at crossing. The trip took about two months, and they reached the Los Angeles area in early November. Of all the party, only the Vaca and Peña families continued on to northern California in December. Leaving the women and children at Sonoma, the men traveled the forty miles to begin settlement by building their houses in Laguna Valley.

General Vallejo once stated that he was the one who suggested the site at Laguna and Vaca Valleys to the Vacas and Peñas. The climate was excellent, there was ample water, grasslands abounded, soils were fertile, and the area lay on the natural transportation routes from the Carquinez Strait to the eastern settlement at Sutter's Fort. Unlike the older province of New Mexico, where choice lands located near water had long since been claimed and where Indians menaced outlying settlements, the "Lihuaytos" tract was a generous ten square leagues of rich, inviting, and

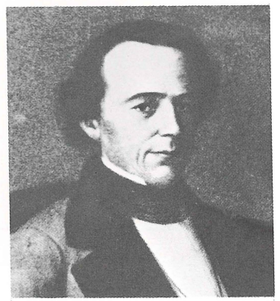


A *diseño,* or map, of the limits of the Vaca-Peña "Lihuaytos" grant (1843)

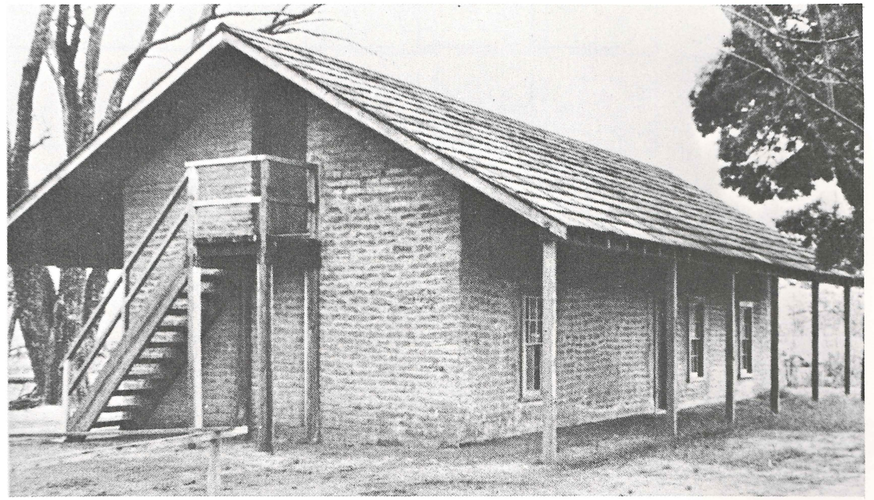
peaceful land. In the official documents it was described as stretching over a terrain "bounded at the east by the Sacramento River, at the west by the Sierra de Napa, at the north by the creek (or Arroyo) de Lihuaytos, and at the south by the river Suisun . . . ." In addition, the cattle herds of the two families used even larger tracts of land due to the lack of people and to the indefinite nature of the land grant that they held.

While the Vaca and Peña families erected their adobes starting in 1842, it was many years before their claim to the "Lihuaytos" grant was finally and legally established through a United States patent to the land. Initially, Vaca petitioned as head of the families for the grant under General Vallejo. In 1843 a formal grant was issued by Governor Manuel Micheltorena at Los Angeles, but the grant boundaries conflicted with the Wolfskill Rio de los Putos grant, so a new decision was needed. In 1845 Governor Pío Pico at Los Angeles issued a new document calling it the Los Putos grant for the first time. The final survey and official United States patent on the land was again delayed until after American occupation. On June 4, 1858, the Vaca-Peña rancho took its final form, and Beck and Haase, **Historical Atlas of California** (1974), show that it was by far the largest land grant in Solano County (44,384 acres). It compared most favorably with the other ranchos: Los Putos (44,384 acres), Los Ulpinos (17,726 acres), Río de los Putos (partly in Yolo County, 17,755 acres), Suisun (17,755 acres), and Tolenas (partly in Napa County, 13,316 acres).

The name given to Los Putos Rancho has always been the source of much humor. Putah Creek crosses Lake, Solano, and Napa counties, and Edwin G. Gudde in his **California Place Names**



Governor Manuel Micheltorena



The Peña Adobe in Lagoon Valley as it was restored and dedicated in 1967

(1969) discusses the origin of the name "Putah." He assumes it is derived from a Patwin Indian village called **Puta-to**, and he says that baptismal records found at the Mission San Francisco Solano mentioned neophytes from the **Putto** or **Puttato** peoples. A problem arises because a similar word, **puta**, means harlot, or "whore," in Spanish. The Spanish word **putos** is masculine plural and was used to refer to both men and women Indians because the Spaniards considered the Indians to be generally sluttish in their sexual customs.

Quite early in the Mexican period, the reference to the Indians along the Putah Creek area began to carry this connotation. By 1872-1873, Stephen Powers, an early visitor and writer, was in the Solano region and reported this popular version in his **Tribes of California** (1877). He mentioned speaking to a "Señor Piña, [sic], who was in the country ten years before the gold discovery," and he mentioned getting the names of the Malaca, Ululato, and Lihuayto Indians:

> These last three names were given to me by a Spaniard and I could find no Indians living by whom to verify them, except that the aboriginal names of Puta Creek was Li-wai. On Lower Puta Creek they were called by the Spaniards, on account of their gross licentiousness, Putos, and the stream Rio de los Putos.

The name and the inference of loose sexual behavior has continued in many versions down to the present time.

On this sprawling land, members of the families began to marry, to build more homes, and to settle into a pastoral way of life that set high value on strong

Mapa de la Villa de
VACAVILLE.

ESTADO de CALIFORNIA:

Fundado por Guillermo Mc Daniel y Lino. B. Mizner.

Solano County Recorder's Office
Filed this December 13th 1851
Sashel Bynum
County Recorder
Solano County

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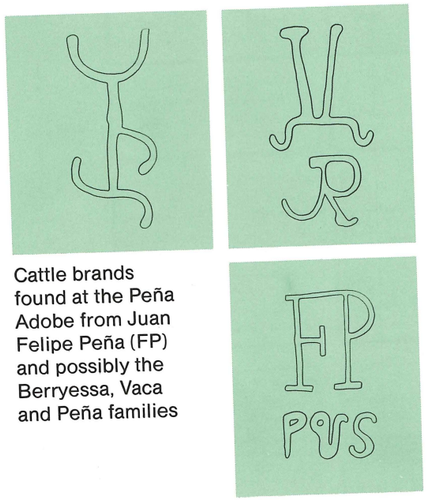


Cattle brands found at the Peña Adobe from Juan Felipe Peña (FP) and possibly the Berryessa, Vaca and Peña families

family ties, the Spanish language, traditional customs like fiestas, religious faith, Mexican foods, and the life of the ranchero. One of the first North American pioneers, Mrs. Luzena Wilson, recalled some of this in her memoirs (**Luzena Stanley Wilson '49er** (1937)). The nearest neighbors of the Wilsons lived "only three-quarters of a mile away, in the little Laguna Valley." Juan Manuel Vaca was the "lord of the soil," over which roamed cattle and mustangs. In fact, "a whole day's hard riding about the grant would not reveal half the extent of their four-footed possessions." John Wolfskill later testified that by 1846 the two partners were grazing some 2,000 cattle and about 200 to 300 horses on their grant.

Mrs. Wilson also recalled other "accompaniments of Spanish happiness" in the following vivid description of their style of life:

> An army of vaqueros congregated every day about the settlement, smoked cigarettes, ran races, played cards for high stakes, and drank bad whiskey in unlimited quantities. The man of position felt proud of his patrician blood, and condescended when he addressed his surrounding inferiors. He wore a broad sombrero, gold-laced jacket and wide bell-decked pantaloons, girt his waist with a flaming sash, wore jingling at his heels, large, clanking, silver spurs, swung a lariat with unerring aim, and in the saddle looked a centaur. The belles of the valley coquetted with the brave riders, threw at them melting glances from their eyes, and whispered sweet nothings in the Spanish tongue.

She was quick to add that "I was always treated with extreme consideration by the Spanish people," and they quite frequently shared their enjoyment by inviting her to festivities.

In fact, an invitation to attend a ball at the Vaca adobe was extended within about two months of their arrival, and she recollects how the dancing went on until nearly midnight when refreshments were served, including "strangely compounded but savory Spanish stews, hot with chilies, great piles of tortillas, and gallons of only tolerable whiskey." The guests were "all laughing, talking, coquetting, and thoroughly enjoying the passing minutes, forgetful of yesterday, heedless of tomorrow, living only in the happy present." Among these guests, she well remembered "the pretty faces and manly figures of the Armijos, Picos, Peñas, and Berryessas . . . ," who were the most influential Spanish families of the country.

North American Pioneers

The flamboyant life of the Mexican ranchero lasted only about five brief years until the war between Mexico and the United States disrupted cattle ranching and the extensive use of great areas of land by a small number of rancheros and vaqueros under Mexican rule. The American flag was raised over California in 1846, gold was discovered in 1848, and the new State of California was created by the fall of 1850. Each of these events had great impact on the Vaca and Laguna valleys. Immigrant wagons coming west increasingly crossed the Sierra Nevada and the Sacramento and Suisun plains bringing settlers to the San Francisco Bay Area, while sea travelers to San Francisco used the Robert Semple ferry service at the Carquinez Strait to travel by horseback and stagecoach eastward to Sacramento and the gold fields. This flow of Americans and other foreigners carried a new way of life as it passed over the natural transportation routes of the future Solano County.

By 1847 the number of Americans in Vaca Valley was increased by the arrival of Albert Lyon, John Patton, J.P. Long, Willis Long, and Clay Long, who were reportedly in the stock-raising business. Even so, Captain E.H. Von Pfister, a resident of Benicia who traveled to Sacramento that year, reported only five homes between Benicia and the Wolfskills on Putah Creek, and three of those belonged to the Armijo, Vaca, and Peña families.

In April 1849 Juan Manuel Vaca made his first sale of land from the Los Putos grant, selling half a league of land be-

tween Alamo and Ulatis creeks for $8,000. The purchasers were Albert Lyon, John Patton, Sr., and John Patton, Jr. This marked the beginning of a new era in Vaca and Laguna valleys. After this came the sale that created the town of Vacaville. On August 21, 1850, Juan Manuel Vaca deeded nine square miles of land to William McDaniel for $3,000 and a promise of 1,055 lots in a new town, one mile square, to be called Vacaville. McDaniel, in turn, deeded half the land to Lansing Bond Mizner, and a plat of the town was recorded on December 13, 1851.

Lansing B. Mizner

Among the earliest pioneers to settle in Vaca Valley was the family of Luzena and Mason Wilson. They had left their log cabin in Missouri to cross the plains to California, lured by the "gold excitement" of 1849. They tried innkeeping in Sacramento and Nevada City without success and then decided in the spring of 1852 that, their "tastes and interests being somewhat agricultural," they would move on west of Sacramento. Luzena Wilson later described her first impressions of their early days to her daughter. These memoirs were published in a delightful and stimulating little book called **Luzena Stanley Wilson '49er**.

Mrs. Wilson describes how they crossed the Sacramento River at Knight's Landing and drove their canvas-covered wagon to Vaca Valley. Her delight with the natural beauty of the setting is clearly stated in her own words:

> The plain from the river bank to the mountains was a sheet of waving grasses and bright-hued wild flowers, trackless and unenclosed. The fresh spring breezes fanned our faces and invigorated our bodies; the calmness and silence of the wide prairie soothed us like a sweet dream. We journeyed on to the foothills, passing for miles through wild oats which rose to the heads of our mules. Antelopes and elks stopped on every knoll, and, surveying us with startled eyes and uplifted heads, wheeled and galloped out of sight.

The wagon trip took four or five days of easy traveling before they reached the first group of low outlying foothills at the base of a spur of the Coast Range.

The family was almost penniless at that point, and they had two sons, Thomas and Jay, to care for. To the Wilsons the land seemed to offer the hope of work and income for resourceful people:

> It was early spring time, and the wild oats growing all about us in such rank profusion, seemed to say, "Here is food and drink and clothing." Hay was selling in San Francisco at a hundred and fifty dollars a ton, so my husband, leaving me to my own resources, set hard at work cutting and making hay; and I, as before, set up my stove and camp kettle and hung out my sign, printed with a charred firebrand on a piece of board, WILSON'S HOTEL.

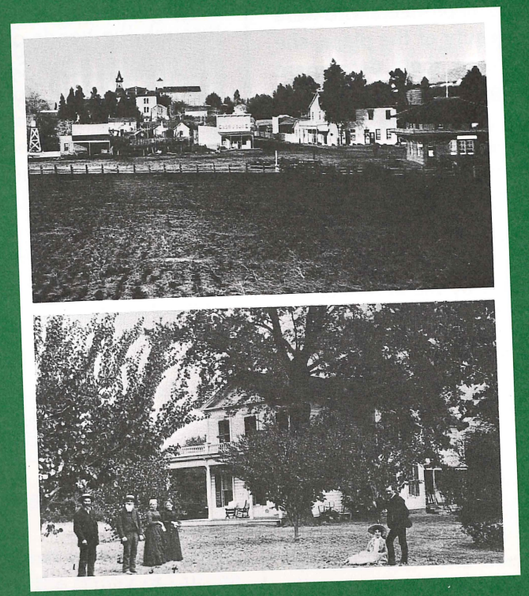
Here was a place they could stay all summer without other shelter or conveniences than those of their covered wagon. Passing travelers became a source of income in return for meals and a haystack to sleep in.

Like so many other pioneers who were attracted by the beauty of the place, she tells how they found their permanent home at what is now Vacaville:

> Our location was close by a tiny spring-fed stream, near the most frequented route from the upper country to Benicia. The shade of a wide-spreading oak afforded us a pleasant shelter from the sunshine, and at night we slept in a tent improvised from the boughs and canvas cover of our wagon. We were fascinated by the beauty of the little valley which already bore the name of Vaca from the Spanish owner of the grant within the limits of which it lay. The green hills smiled down on us through their sheeny veil of grass. The great oak trees, tall and stately, bent down their friendly arms as if to embrace us; the nodding oats sang a song of peace and plenty to the music of the soft wind; the inquisitive wild flowers, peeping up with round, wide opened eyes from the edge of every footpath bade us stay. We made up our minds, if possible, to buy land and settle.

And they did.

By 1851 the region had passed through the hands of the Southern Patwin Indians, a few Spanish expeditions, and the Mexican home-seekers. These settlers left their marks in the names given natural landmarks, rivers, towns, and land grants, but little else remains from the half century before Solano County was established. To the North Americans and other immigrants who were to settle the region the rich, undeveloped land offered a challenge and an opportunity to produce, progress, and build a new life, a new county, and a new state.



PART TWO

The Rise of the Town, 1851–1880

Building on the thin veneer of an isolated, Hispanic frontier base, increasing numbers of immigrants began to settle in the Solano region. They came from the United States and from many other countries of the Old and New Worlds and Asia, and they brought their own ideas about the land and what it should produce for mankind. They brought new crops to add to those already introduced by the short-lived Mexican ranchos. The dominant white, European settlers wanted Anglo-Saxon forms of government, family-sized forms of landholding and production, public education, colleges, Anglo social behavior, and their own cherished Protestant religion. They were excited about the physical surroundings at Vacaville, and they had great expectations for the kind of rewarding society they could develop there in the years following 1851.

Having fled the confinement of older societies they were thrilled by the freedom and natural abundance of this new land. Their attitudes were positive, they had a great ability to observe and to learn from experience, and they displayed a drive to experiment and to innovate. All in all, they were a talented and progressive breed of pioneer men and women, and they laid down a remarkable heritage for their successors during the thirty years from 1851 to 1880.

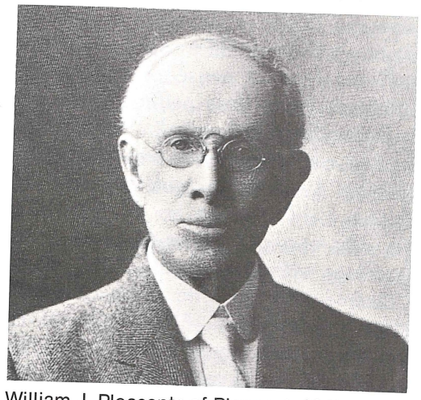
Taming the Land

In 1851 Vacaville emerged as a planned community with a number of favorable conditions for growth. It was centrally located in a region that combined rich soil in valley floors and on hillside slopes with ample streams, good grasslands, a climate that supported luxuriant plant growth without irrigation, and a location on the horse and stage routes between the growing wealthy population centers and potential markets of the San Francisco Bay Area to the west and Sacramento to the east.

The land had never before been cleared and planted to any great extent beyond the cultivation in the gardens of the Mexican adobes. The Indian, the Spaniard, and the Mexican ranchero had lived off the land and its great abundance, but none of those earlier societies had altered the land to organized agricultural production. The pioneer generation that came to live at and around Vacaville had really to conquer the land as a first step of settlement, and they set out at once to do just that. Later they would turn to reshaping the world of human social organization into the kind of life-style that suited their needs.

The "Old Settlers"

It takes time to clear land, build homes, and plant crops enough to feed the family and take to market. In the meantime the new settlers took the natural resources at hand like wild game and hay and turned them into an immediate source of living or into trade items to sell to the cities growing up at San Francisco and Sacramento. Farmers also needed transportation routes along which to ship their wares to market, and there were few roads and, in many regions, not even trails. The pioneers had to face primitive conditions and overcome the rawness of the empty land as they began to turn the riches of the land to their benefit.



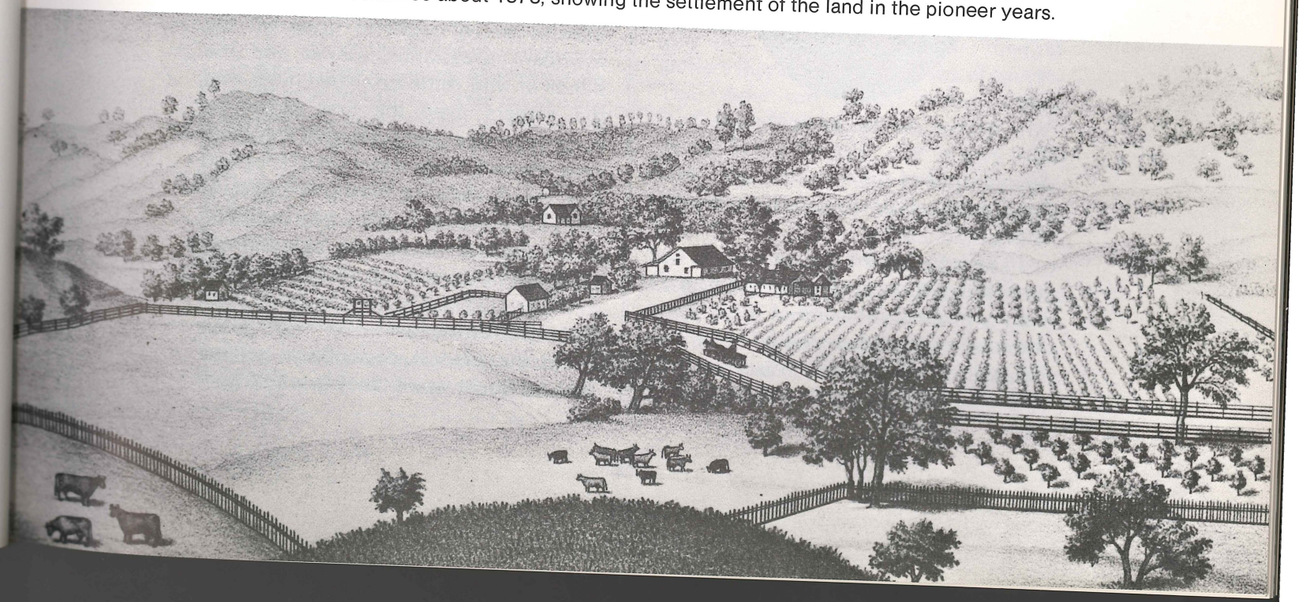
William J. Pleasants of Pleasants Valley

In a **Weekly Solano Republican** newspaper account on February 3, 1882, William J. Pleasants recounted his arrival in Pleasants Valley with his father, James M. Pleasants:

> we left Putah [Creek] and traveled southward about three miles, and came into this beautiful valley December 7, 1850. . . . As we were the first settlers, and as the valley had no name, we gave it our own—Pleasants. . . . This valley, now so famous as a fruit-growing district, was once the home of vast herds of wild animals, such as elk, deer, grizzly bears, California lions, and wolves. I have counted one hundred deer in a short day's hunt. One afternoon, I saw eleven grizzly bears in two miles' travel, and within one mile of this valley. It is needless to say, we killed both deer and bears whenever we pleased. The largest grizzly we ever killed weighed, when dressed, eight hundred pounds. In conclusion, I will say that I still have in my possession the first plow that ever ran a furrow in this valley, which was in 1851.

In the same newspaper on October 19, 1874, an "Old Settler" confirmed this description and added a bit to the story.

The Pleasants residence about 1878, showing the settlement of the land in the pioneer years.



He told how the Pleasants lived in a canvas tent for a year while they killed bears and deer for the Sacramento market. Roads did not exist, and the valley was so dense with underbrush that a man on horseback could not ride through it.

Along with the Pleasants, Meredith R. Miller (1851) and George W. Thissell (1857) were the other earliest settlers. As they each settled to till the soil, the Pleasants erected a log house, and Miller put up one of oak slabs from the valley trees. Thissell brought boards from

Forty-niner George W. Thissell

Suisun most of the way by wagon, hauling them the final distance by horse and chain.

In Vaca Valley, the Mason Wilsons had also brought lumber from Benicia to build a house by the end of 1852. When they moved from their prairie "hotel" into the rude structure, Mrs. Wilson recalled that she "had grown so accustomed to sleeping in the open air, that the first night we slept under a roof I absolutely suffered from a sense of suffocation, although there were neither doors nor windows to the structure."

A similar experience was shared by George A. Gillespie, who came to the Suisun plain area near Vacaville in 1852. He was engaged in haying and grain farming with his brother, Edgar F. Gillespie, until the latter started the first store in Vacaville in 1854. There was no lumber for fencing or building, and the roaming bands of cattle and horses were a threat to cultivated grain fields and vegetable gardens, so early farmers improvised by digging ditches and piling up oak branches to guard the newly sown fields from destruction by livestock.

Grain was so scarce that settlers could not follow the eastern custom of feeding barley to the stock. Also, fresh hay could only be preserved and used in the dry summer months, because winter rains destroyed the hay that was not kept under shelter. So, the settlers turned their animals out at night to graze off the abundant grasslands. Game and the bands of wild cattle furnished meat, and the settlers lived the first winter on coarse, ground corn instead of the wheat flour they were accustomed to. They had little choice because "owing to excessive rains of the season and the miry condition of the trails, it was next to impossible to obtain any provisions from Benicia."

Entertainment

From the earliest days, these settlers showed great spirit; they worked hard but they could enjoy life, too. There were few women and families in the earliest days, and this was reflected in the "coarser" forms of entertainment for the most part until female immigrants and families began to arrive. Edgar Gillespie recalled that hunting, shooting matches, and scrub-horse racing were the main amusements, and these remained popular for the first few decades of American settlement.

Mrs. Wilson furnished some "woman's touch" by 1853, although it was a very modest beginning when contrasted with the grand social occasions at weddings, balls, holiday celebrations, and other community events of the next twenty or thirty years. She recalled:

> The second Christmas [1853] of our stay I gave a dinner party, and invited all the Americans in the Vaca Valley; even then I entertained only five guests. My dinner party was considered very fine for the time. My cook was a negro of the blackest hue, who had formerly cooked for some army officer, and was accustomed to skirmishing, as he expressed it. The menu included onion soup, roast elk, a fricassee of lamb, boiled onions, the home-grown luxury of radishes, lettuce, parsley, dried-apple pie, and rice pudding. Fowls were too rare and valuable to be sacrificed, as yet, to the table, and probably had they been killed would have defied mastication, for they were, like ourselves, pioneers.

Association with neighbors was important, and a sense of oneness with a few others was the reward in the early days. A few months before her Christmas party, Mrs. Wilson decided to visit her nearest American neighbors, John R. Wolfskill and Matthew Wolfskill and his wife on Putah Creek to the north. Saddling a horse and tying her two sons, Thomas and Jay, behind her with a stout rope, she started for Putah Creek without knowing exactly where the Wolfskills lived. No roads existed, so they traveled along trying to avoid the bands of wild "Spanish" cattle. These cattle were felt to be dangerous to the mounted rider, and Mrs. Wilson thought they were "certain death" to anyone on foot. But when one of the boys' hats blew off, she had the little boy retrieve it, because a hat was "precious and not easily procured at that time." He "clambered down and climbed up again, in the face of the tossing heads, red eyes and spreading horns. . . ." Fortunately, the outing was a successful visit without any other incident, and it was the beginning of a lifelong friendship between these two pioneer families.

A First Census

The Pleasants, Wilsons, and Gillespies left accounts to show the simple adjustments made by early settlers in the Vacaville area, but they were neither the first settlers there nor the only ones, of course. The American stockbreeders—Lyon, Patton, and the Longs—joined the Wolfskills, Vacas, Peñas, and others after 1847. From September 30 to November 20, 1850, Lansing B. Mizner from Benicia took the first census of Solano County. In the census returns, he listed himself as a twenty-four-year-old merchant from Illinois, since he held a quarter interest in the mercantile firm of Semple, Robinson and Company. Another Benicia resident was William McDaniel, a forty-eight-

The Towson grain and stock farm was located about one and a half miles west of Vacaville.

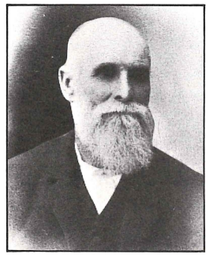
year-old lawyer from Kentucky. These two men were the ones responsible for the creation of Vacaville in 1850–1851, as mentioned in Part I.

The enumeration by Mizner listed a total of 580 people in the county, only 100 of them in twenty-nine families residing outside Benicia. Many of these twenty-nine families included early pioneers of the broader Vacaville area. Manuel Vaca, Marcos Vaca, Nepona Vaca, Tiofilo Vaca, and Madalina Vaca,

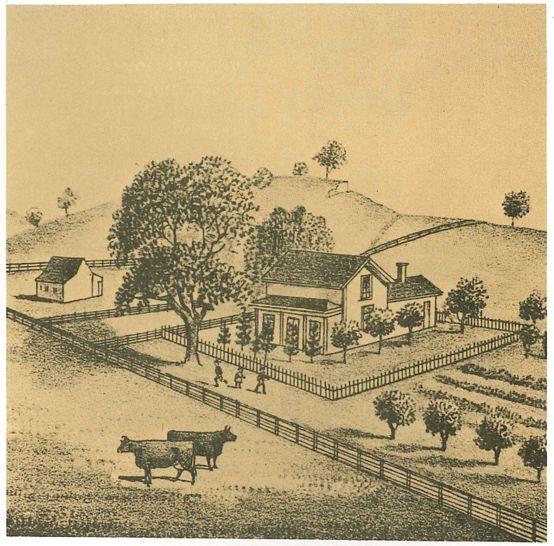
all headed separate households, as did Juan Felipe Peña. A household was listed under P. Long, and it included Garrard Long, Clay Long, and two male Longs without first names (one of them would be Willis Long). Samuel Green McMahon was listed, too, and misspelled, but listed, were John "Wolfscale," Matthew "Wolfscale," and Milton "Wolfscale," the Wolfskills of Putah Creek fame.

Other early immigrants of that date like Evan Dollarhide and the Hollingsworth families are not listed in the census, but they are credited with being there by other early reports. For example David Dollarhide's home was a voting place in 1857, while John Hollingsworth was a Vacaville constable in that same year. Another person usually mentioned as an early resident is Marshall M. Bayse.

By 1852, a few more men and families were moving into the township each year. Edward McGeary, John Fisk, James McGuire and his family, J.G. Parks, Richardson Long, Southey W. Long, Henry B. Ammons, W.J. Dobbins,



Willian B. Towson was born in Baltimore, Maryland, and Mary E. Towson in Palmyra, Missouri.



The Towsons, who married in 1864 and lived in this home, had nine sons and four daughters.

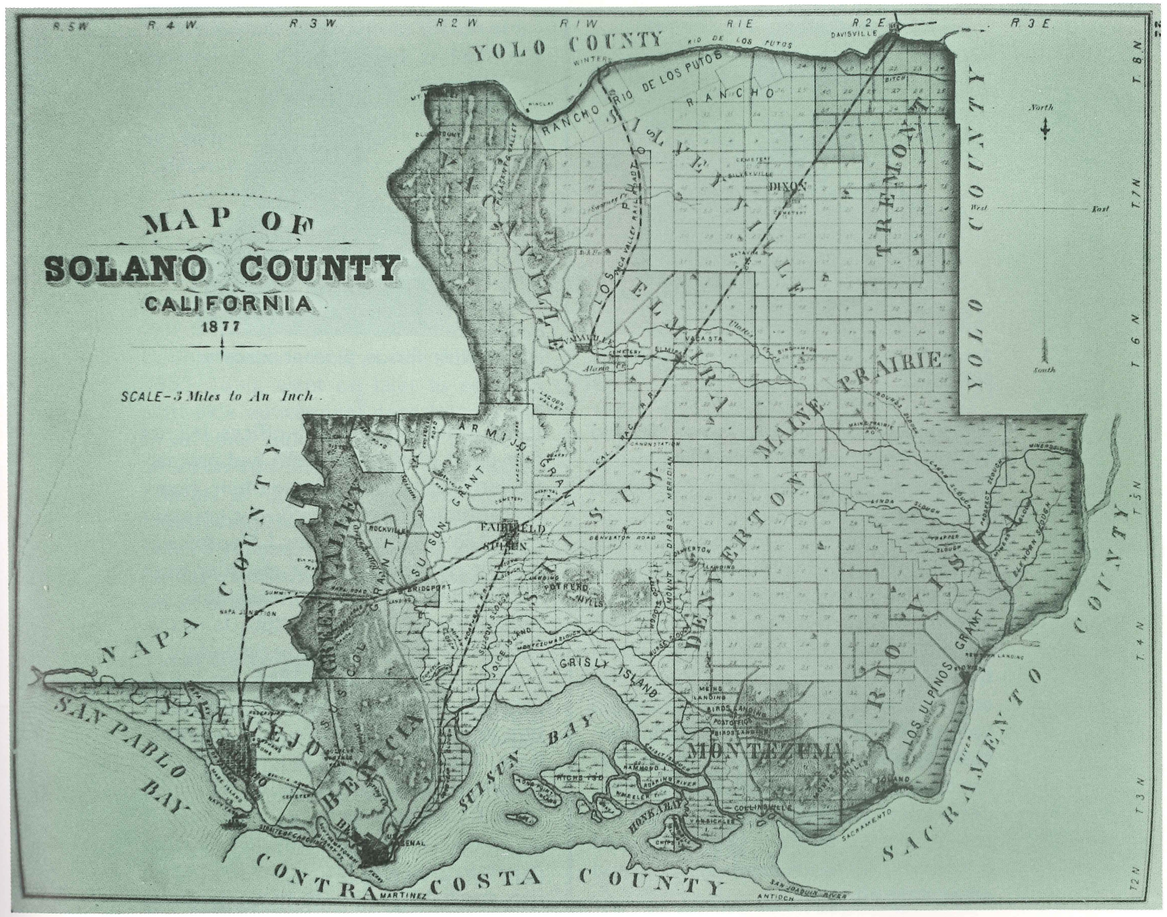
E.L. Bennett, Theodore Gates, Joseph Longmire, A.M. and G.B. Stevenson, W.B. Towson, and William A. Dunn and his family all settled and gave life to a growing community. William McDaniel had erected the first building in 1850, and James McGuire built a "rude edifice" as a hotel. In 1854, E.F. Gillespie opened the first store, and soon Vacaville was assigned the fourth post office in the county, reflecting its growing population and importance. The first man appointed postmaster was William J. Hooton on June 1, 1854, and that post office has remained in continual operation to the present.

Setting up a Government

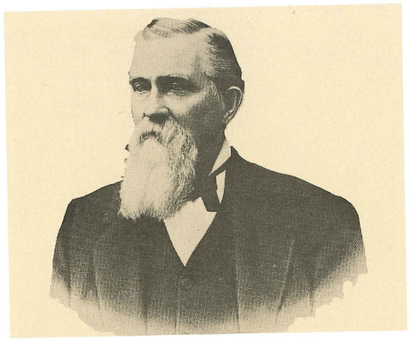
As the first families moved into the area around Vacaville, the need to establish a government structure became urgent. California was divided into counties by legislative action in 1850, and Solano County, with its county seat at Benicia, became one of the first twenty-seven original counties in that year. Between 1850 and 1871 the county was gradually subdivided into a total of twelve townships beginning with Benicia and Suisun townships in 1851. On November 1, 1852, Suisun was subdivided, creating the new township of Vacaville. As the population continued to move inland to Solano County, further subdivision established eight other townships down to the final one at Elmira township, formed on May 22, 1871. After 1871 Vacaville township included essentially Vaca, Pleasants, and Lagoon valleys, with the town of Vacaville as the growing trade and service center of the three valleys.

The Structure of County Government

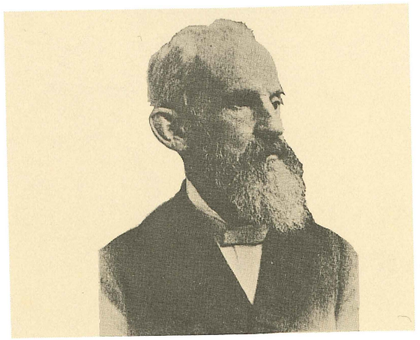
Government needs were relatively simple. A board of supervisors (called The Court of Sessions from 1850 to 1855), made up of three elected supervisors, conducted the business of the county under thirteen different categories of duties. The main ones were to levy taxes, provide a county judge, create and manage public roads and other transportation facilities like bridges and ferries, provide for the sick and indigent, provide voting precincts, erect and maintain county buildings like a court house and jail, and establish new townships



Vacaville Township to the northwest was one of twelve Solano County townships by 1871.



Henry E. McCune, civic leader and state senator



James W. Anderson, pioneer educator

for the growing population in Solano County. The township system lasted until 1952 when a state judicial act eliminated constables and justices of the peace throughout the state, leaving townships to function only as voting districts.

In addition to supervisors, the voters elected other countywide officers like recorder, assessor, county judge, clerk, treasurer, surveyor, auditor, sheriff, tax collector, and coroner. For each township voters elected justices of the peace, constables, and, after 1861, roadmasters to conduct local government. Finally, at the designated intervals, they went to the polling places to elect presidents and governors, senators, assemblymen, and other state officers.

County Officers

J.P. Munro Fraser, who wrote the **History of Solano County** in 1879, compiled a very useful table of officers elected by the county from 1850 to 1879. By and large, Vacaville township elected some of its leading citizens to county offices, but not any great number of them and not particularly high offices. For example, Henry B. Ammons served as county assessor from 1853–1855, William J. Hooton was county clerk and county recorder from 1855–1859, F.J. Bartlett was public administrator in 1859 and 1860, James W. Anderson was county superintendent of schools in 1855 and 1856, and E.F. Gillespie was sheriff in 1863 (which led him to move to Suisun and to live there from 1863 to 1875). Solomon Decker served in 1869–1870 as public administrator from Vacaville.

On the local level, Vacaville Township generally had two justices of the peace, two constables, two or three commissioners of common schools (from 1852 to 1854 and in 1862), and one to three roadmasters (from 1861 to 1863). It often furnished a supervisor from District 3, which was first formed in 1855 for Vacaville, Montezuma, and Tremont townships.

At the state level, Milton Wason of the Vacaville township served as California assemblyman for Solano County from 1863 to 1864, and Henry Ewalt McCune, an early settler who was a trustee of California College, was state senator from Solano and Yolo counties in 1873–1874. His residence was ultimately in Dixon, but he was very active in the Vacaville area. James W. Anderson, who established the Ulatus Academy in Vacaville in 1855, and who served as Solano County superintendent of schools in 1855–1856, went on later to serve in statewide educational departments and to be state superintendent of public instruction from 1891–1894. These elected officials at the state level, as well as those named to the county and township offices, represented many of the early families who made contributions to all walks of life.

Vacaville Township Votes Democratic

The voting pattern of Vacaville township from 1851 to 1880 was very interesting. In that thirty-year period, Vacaville township voters cast their support solidly behind the Democratic party, with few exceptions. In 1851, when both the Democratic party and the Whigs had strong organizations in California, Vacaville voted about three to one for the strongly agrarian and popular sovereignty program of the Whigs, but the Democrats won the state. The Whig party disbanded in 1855, leaving Vacaville voters to move into the Democratic party, which was closer to their interests than

Where are the Copperheads?

Go, look upon the battle-field,
  Where shot and shell fly fast—
Where Freedom's battle-cry
  Is heard upon the blast;
Go where the lifted sabers flash
  And fall on traitor crests—
Where Southern bayonets are dim
  With blood from Northern breasts;
Go search amid the loyal ranks—
  Among the glorious dead:—
Among them all you will not find
  A single Copperhead!

Go, search the gunboat's bloody deck
  When the dread conflict 's done—
The traitor's banner in the dust,
  And silenced every gun;
While o'er the hard-won rampart floats
  Our flag—yet oh! what pain!
'Neath that dear flag, since morning light,
  How many have been slain!
Among the heroes of the fight,
  The living and the dead—
Go search among them:—there is not
  A single Copperhead!

Go, search the crowded hospital,
  Where ghastly wounds are seen
Which tell through what a struggle fierce
  These noble men have been;
But look upon their faces—lo!
  They smile through all their pain;
The scars they bear were nobly won—
  Their honor has no stain!
Soft hands are minist'ring, kind words
  Are heard around each bed;
Some soothe, some suffer—all are true:—
  There is no Copperhead!

Go, where the look can scarce conceal
  The treason of the heart,
And where the tongue would willingly
  Defend the traitor's part:
Where Seymour, Wood, and Voorhees are
  Deemed patriotic men;
Go where they wish Vallandigham
  Were safely back again;
Go where desertion is no crime—
  Where loyalty is dead—
Where sad disaster gives no pain:—
  There is the Copperhead.

Go where foul scorn is heaped upon
  Our noble boys who go
To stand a wall of fire between
  Us and our traitor foe;
Go where bold Grant's revilers are—
  Where Burnside is defamed;
Where Banks and Butler (noble names!)
  With scoffs alone are named;
Go where true patriotic Pride,
  Honor, and Truth are dead—
Where our success but brings despair:—
  There is the Copperhead!

the new, but still weak, Republican party. However, in 1858, Vacaville split between the Democrats, who won a close victory, and the anti-Lecompton Democrats who could not support President James Buchanan in his acceptance of the proslavery Lecompton constitution in Kansas, where the lawmakers did not allow the constitution to go to the people for approval through a popular vote.

By 1864 Vacaville township was back in the Democratic fold, and they voted two to one for the Democratic candidate, General George B. McClellan, against the incumbent Republican, Abraham Lincoln. This represented a 66.4 percent Democratic vote, and Vacaville residents were widely referred to as "copperheads," a popular term for opponents of the Lincoln administration who were sympathetic to the South in the Civil War. Only Vacaville, Green Valley, and Denverton, of the Solano townships, voted for McClellan and this raised suspicion and dislike for their politics.

Opponents of the Vacaville "copperheads" apparently went so far as to burn down the Pacific Methodist College of Vacaville a few days after the assassination of Lincoln. The college had been founded by the Methodist Church, South, and it was popularly believed to support the secessionists. The voting records show that by 1879, Vacaville Democrats were not even able to elect a Vacaville township Democrat to county office, and this could well be additional evidence of county dislike for Vacaville voting practices arising in the Civil War era.

Actually it is fairly obvious that Vacaville township voted, not against Lincoln and the Union cause, but **for** the Democratic party. The basic interests of Vacaville were agrarian and deeply identified with Democratic platforms and against the "big business" interests of Republicans. If one counts the number of Vacaville residents in the census of 1860, only 7.7 percent were born in any of the Confederate States of America. In fact, only about 7 percent of all Californians during the Civil War came from the seceeded states. This small faction alone was not enough to throw Vacaville into the Democratic camp because of secessionist sympathies. Moreover, a study of the elections after the war ended shows that Vacaville township continued to vote for the Democratic party in every election and that Democrats outnumbered Republicans two or three to one in every election except 1879.

As a staunch Democratic party township, Vacaville lost the county elections most years, although Whigs won Solano county in 1851 and Democrats won in 1877. Vacaville Democrats fared better at the state and national level, and won elections in 1851, 1858, 1875, and 1880. But it is fair to summarize by stating that Vacaville voted its agrarian interests, lost frequently to the Republican party in the county elections, and managed to elect only a modest number of Vacaville township politicians to county and state offices from 1851 to 1880.

Although the 1864 election was a most serious event for a nation locked in civil conflict, it had its lighter aspects. One such incident was reported in the **Semi-**

Weekly Solano Herald on October 19, 1864. Many politicians stumped the Vacaville area for their parties. Among these were J.C. Hinkley and John Doughty, who were to address citizens at Vacaville on a Friday on behalf of the Abraham Lincoln-Andrew Johnson ticket. Unfortunately, that weekend "spirits" got out of hand for both Republicans and Democrats, as described by the editor, who was a Union man and a temperance advocate too. He wrote:

> In recently announcing that Messrs. John Doughty and J.C. Hinkley would address the people in the upper part of the county, we expressed the "hope that Bro. Hinkley would keep Bro. Doughty sober during the trip." We are sorry to be compelled to record the fact that he didn't succeed; at least, he met with so little success that the last seen of him in Vacaville he was flourishing a horse-pistol, inquiring the price of strychnine and talking gloomily about committing suicide–after having spent the night carousing with his copperhead friends.
>
> By way of an offset, Tom Laine got so completely obfuscated with strong drink that he was not able to make the Democratic speech he was announced to deliver at Vacaville on Saturday night.

At times, politics could be a very lively occupation, as any one can see from these examples.

The Solano County Seat Contest

In those same years, there was one political issue of great interest to the people of Vacaville and Vacaville township. That was the question of whether Benicia should continue to be the location of the county seat. After 1855 the county population began to shift inland into the upper part of the county, and there was increasing competition between the coastal townships and the inland townships over the most representative location between citizens and their center of government. As early as March 1, 1856, the **Solano County Herald** clearly described these concerns in an editorial:

> We can hardly wonder that the residents of Suisun and Vaca Valleys, [now] that their business at the county seat [Benicia] is increasing so rapidly, owing to their land titles becoming settled, should desire that the office of the recorder should be more accessible. With the present facilities of travel and business there must be some change. Until the past year the main business transacted by the people residing in Suisun and Vaca Valleys had been during the sessions of the Courts, and the duty of attending as witnesses and jurymen has at times borne upon them very onerously. We have seen during the present season at least forty men kept from their avocations when time was money to them, at expense to themselves (for the State or county does not pay witnesses or jurymen a fair compensation) at least two weeks in attending upon our District Court and Court of Sessions. . . .

The editorial went on to suggest the need to "hurry up a railroad" as one way to help Benicia escape the problem.

By March 20, 1858, two years later, the same paper carried another editorial on the "Removal of the County Seat," describing it as a "long mooted question [that] is at length to be tested." Events began to move quickly and decisively. An "Act to re-locate the county seat of Solano County by the qualified voters of

said county" was announced as approved on April 24, 1858, and a month later citizens of Suisun City and Fairfield met and invited other townships to a convention to select a central place for the county seat. Five townships accepted and sent twenty-nine delegates to Suisun City on August 7 — Suisun (10), Vacaville (10), Montezuma (3), Tremont (2), and Green Valley (4). The number of delegates was based on the number of voters the town had in the most recent vote for governor.

Of a total of four officers presiding at the convention, three were from Vacaville—H.G. Davidson, president; George A. Gillespie, secretary; and H.B. Ammons, secretary. The delegates proposed four sites for county seat: Fairfield, Suisun City, Denverton, and, Vacaville delegate, E.J. Bartlett, proposed the town of Vacaville. Besides Davidson, Gillespie, Ammons, and Bartlett, the other six Vacaville delegates were W. Fore, E.L. Bennett, E.S. Silvey (later of Silveyville), Mason Wilson, J.M. Dudley, and James W. Anderson. Varying offers of land and money in return for the county seat location came from all but Denverton. Fairfield offered Union Park, a sixteen-acre land plot, and four blocks of twelve lots each, north and south of Union Park. Suisun City put up a lot 100 by 100 feet along with $5,550 in money. Mason Wilson stated the Vacaville offer of four blocks of lots and $1,000 in money.

The twenty-nine delegates voted most heavily for the two towns located most nearly at the geographical center of the county, Fairfield winning with sixteen votes and Suisun City runner up with twelve votes. Denverton got the only remaining ballot. Vacaville was not a serious contender for county seat due to its peripheral location and lack of transportation facilities and roads. However, it was clear that the new location at Fairfield, or Suisun City, was in the best interest of Vacaville.

The question of a new county seat was next moved to a general county election set for September 2, 1858, and the matter was decided with 1,730 voters choosing among six proposed towns:

Fairfield	1,029
Benicia	626
Denverton	38
Suisun City	26
Vallejo	10
Rockville	2

The **Solano County Herald** (September 11, 1858) reported that Vacaville cast 248 ballots in the election, 240 of them for the winner, Fairfield, 4 for Benicia, and 4 for a "scattering" of places. The rules called for a transfer of the county government within thirty days, and this was done.

The **Solano County Herald** announced on September 4 that:

> Benicia has gone to Hell, her glory hath departed. . . . She is the seat of justice no more, and if she knows herself never will be again. She was the proud capital of the State—she was the County Seat—she was the terminous of a great railroad—she was the headquarters of the army, and within the recollection of the oldest inhabitants, she was the emporium of the Pacific. **Dium fait.**

On October 1 the **Herald** also left Hell and moved to the Fairfield area.

The matter of the location of the county seat did not rest, however. By September 1873, Vallejo was raising the question of removing the county government to Vallejo. Vallejo claimed that it was more populous; was better located physically than the "dreary, treeless plain" at Fairfield; had more and better accommodations for travelers; had railroad transportation all across the county; and was willing to furnish new, proper government buildings at a manageable cost. Vallejo boosters argued that a central geographical location at Fairfield was no longer needed, the cost of removal would be modest, and Vallejo would provide new buildings adequate to the county's needs for the coming quarter of a century. An election took place on November 26, and Vallejo had a majority of over 300 votes over Fairfield. Vacaville township, however, stuck with Fairfield by a vote of 226 to 21 (**Weekly Solano Republican**, December 4, 1873).

There were charges of election fraud in Vallejo's three voting wards, and a controversy began that caused resistance to moving the county seat to the new location. When court action failed to determine the charges of fraud a bill was introduced in the state senate to divide Solano County and create a separate County of Vallejo. When the bill passed Fairfield and Suisun City were delighted to be separate rather than continue under the "odious vassalage" of a town that had half the population but only one-third the taxable property in the county. However, Governor Newton Booth vetoed the division and indicated that he would approve a bill to return the county seat to Fairfield. On March 28, 1874, a bill was approved by both houses in "exactly twenty-eight minutes," to the effect that "**the county seat of Solano County shall be Fairfield, in said county**." The county seat location finally rested there.

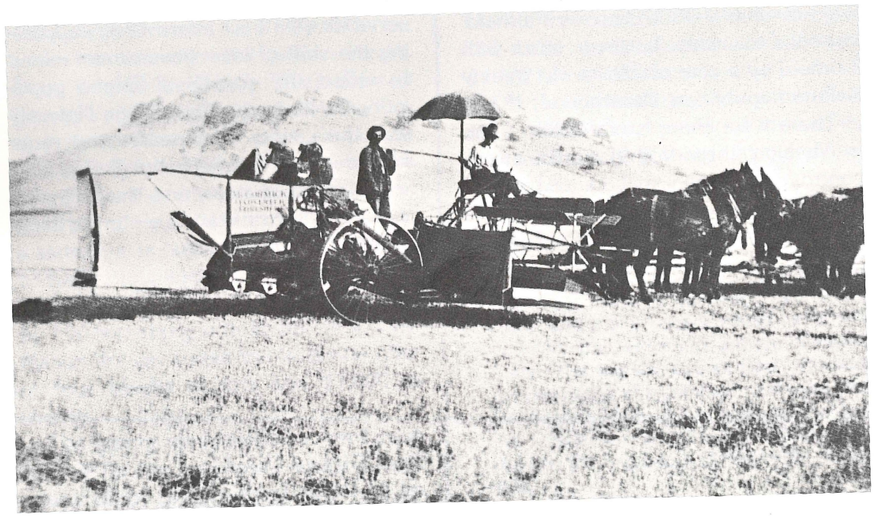
Vacaville played a leading role in the transfer of the county seat to Fairfield in 1858 and in keeping it there in 1873–1874. In this arena, Vacaville managed to serve its own best interests by supporting the shift of local government inland to reflect the growth of Solano population in its twelve townships. Not only was the county seat nearer and more convenient at Fairfield, but Suisun City was right next door, and it was a very important transportation center for Vacaville township products.

The Search for Commercial Production

As the fertile valleys and foothills of upper Solano County developed stockbreeders and farmers turned rather quickly from subsistence agriculture, hunting, and grazing to developing new commercial crops and seeking wider markets in the county, the state, the nation, and even foreign lands. The golden valleys and hillsides would become an ample and long-lasting alternative to the gold that drew so many settlers to Vacaville township during and after the California gold rush.

Cattle

From 1850 to 1880, livestock and wheat were the leading products in Solano County, although farmers also continued to tend vineyards, orchards, gardens, and field crops, and these proved to be of increasing value as the years went by.



Building on the so-called Spanish cattle and other stock of the Mexican rancho period, people in Solano County gradually increased their herds and introduced new livestock through the years. The state census taken in California in 1852 shows a modest beginning in Solano in horses (1,936), mules (187), cows (2,185), beef cattle (1,085), work oxen (1,149), sheep (1,949), and hogs (2,264). In 1857, the **Solano County Herald** (November 28, 1857) carried a report by the tax assessor that showed how livestock was increasing by great strides. By the 1870s, however, the number of livestock had pretty well leveled out, with only sheep still increasing. The **Weekly Solano Republican** (March 2, 1876) reported the following representative figures for 1874: horses, 4,185; mules, 698; cattle, 16,511; hogs, 6,540; and sheep 24,731.

The many stockbreeders in the Vacaville township area followed the general practices in the county, that is they started with Mexican cattle and after a decade or so brought better breeds from the East. In 1856, for example, A.M. Stevenson brought a large herd from the ranchos of southern California to fatten and sell in the San Francisco and Sacramento markets:

> On last Monday and Tuesday over a thousand head of cattle crossed on the Martinez Ferry Boat, on their way to Suisun Valley, being the property of Messrs. A.M. Stevenson and Ed. McGarry. They were as fine a lot of Spanish cattle as we have ever seen. They were driven from Los Angeles county. (**Solano County Herald,** May 17, 1856)

The following year on August 8 the same newspaper reported "a drove of blooded cattle, intended for Solano County, had started from Missouri. . . . the property of Mr. S.W. Long, who resides in Vaca Valley, where he intends to improve the stock of California." By 1862, the county assessor reported only about one tenth of the cattle from Spanish California stock, and the number was falling.

Sheep

Sheep were also an important commercial product, and Vacaville sheep raisers took an active part in sheep production for wool and meat. One early sheep-raiser was William Buck Long. His daughter, Minnie Long, later recounted how he went to Missouri in 1853 to bring a herd of sheep to Vacaville, returning in 1854 with the sheep that survived the drive. The Long family is reputed to have brought as many as 3,000 sheep at a time in the early days when newspaper accounts from time to time noted droves of sheep en route to Vacaville. As the years went by, sheep production remained limited but important. Mr. Thomas Roberts, of Vacaville, had a reputation in the 1860s for raising fine Spanish Merino sheep and selling them to improve the breed in California. O.P. Dobbins, who was a grain grower, too, sold a herd of 2,000 Merinos in 1878. The next year, Carl Gates shipped two or three hundred head of sheep through Suisun by steamer.

Grain

As cultivated fields were extended and

David D. Dutton, pioneer farmer

most of the land in the valleys and on the adjacent slopes was put under crop cultivation, grazing of livestock was simply not possible in much of the township. That livestock soon began to take a secondary position to grain production can be seen very clearly in the census returns from 1850 to 1880. In 1850, the few families in the area—the Vacas, Peñas, Longs, David Dutton, the Stevenson brothers, and S.G. McMahon—were all stockraisers. In 1860 Vacaville township had 123 persons listed in the census as stockraisers, shepherds, and stock dealers, but by 1870, only one person was listed as a shepherd and one was listed as a stockdealer. In 1880 there were one stockdealer, one drover, one horseman, and one hostler in the town of Vacaville, and in the whole township, there were only two stockraisers, one shepherd, and one hostler. As Minnie Long explained in the case of her father, William Buck Long, he began with stockraising and then went to grain raising until fruit raising began for him about 1881.

The state of California had traditionally been an importer of wheat until 1854, and a surplus was grown for the first time in 1855. The increased population in California and famine and wars in Europe raised the demand and prices for grain during the 1860s. The fertility of Solano County enabled the county to lead California in wheat production by 1867, when wheat replaced stockraising in importance. On December 11, 1867, the **Solano Press** happily made the following announcement to its readers:

> Hurrah for Solano!!!—The Surveyor General, in his biennial report recently made to the Legislature, announces the gratifying fact that Solano County, in 1866, was the second largest wheat growing county of the State, and that, in 1867, she leads the van; being therefore the banner wheat producing county of the Pacific Coast. . . . In 1867, the largest wheat growing counties are: Solano, 160,000 acres; Santa Clara, 150,000; and San Joaquin, 91,970.

Acreage fell in later years but wheat remained the main commercial crop in the years down to 1880.

The **Weekly Solano Herald** of January 2, 1869, carried a very descriptive statement on "Wheat in Solano":

> Wheat is our staple, and Solano now leads the other counties of the State in its production. The principal varieties raised

Edwin Markham in *California the Wonderful* tells how "the monster machine crashes its way through the yellow gold of the fields . . . [as] flying knives clip off the heads of wheat . . . . Shelled by the rushing teeth [a] clean stream of wheat . . . [flows] in to the gaping mouth of the sack. Thus the glory of the grain is gathered in to feed the hunger of the world."

are Australian and Club, some Chili, and very little Sonora. This immense crop is now transported in wagons and by railroad to the various shipping ports of the county on the Sacramento River and Suisun Bay, and is then carried by sloops to San Francisco, with the exception of that which is carried to Vallejo by rail, which is loaded on shipboard at the Vallejo wharves, bound directly for Liverpool [England].

By 1878 Vacaville township was a strong participant in the production of wheat and travelers often remarked that the Vaca Valley wheat stood more than five feet high with large well-developed heads; it was outstanding wheat.

The Farmer's Lesson.

If I had told her in the spring
The old, old story, briefly,
When sparrow and robin began to sing,
And the plowing was over chiefly!

But haste makes waste, and the story sweet,
I reasoned, will keep through the sowing,
Till I drop the corn, and plant the wheat,
And give them a chance for growing.

Had I even told the tale in June,
When the wind through the grass was blowing
Instead of thinking it rather too soon,
And waiting till after the mowing!

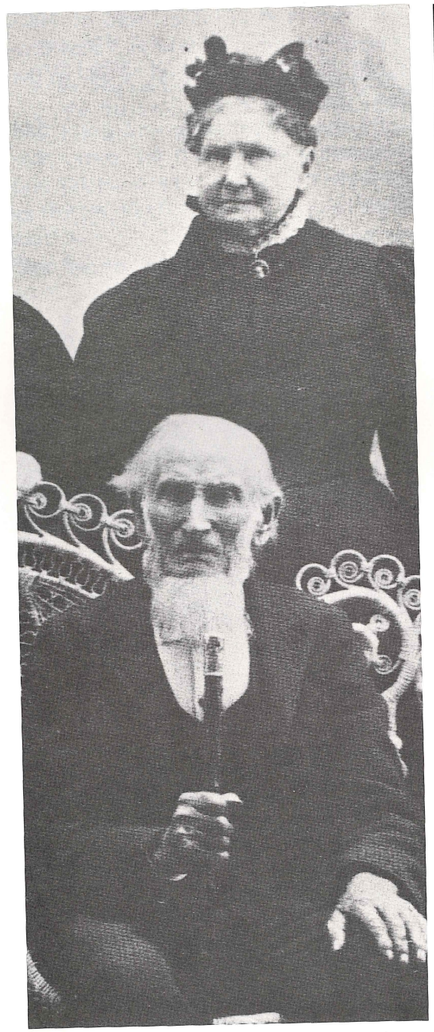
Or had I hinted, out under the stars,
That I knew a story worth hearing,
Lingering to put up the pasture bars,
Nor waited to do the shearing!

Now the barn is full, and so is the bin,
But I've grown wise without glory,
Since love is the crop not gathered in—
For my neighbor told her the story!

Other crops were developed along with wheat. Hay had sustained some of the earliest residents in the 1850s, and it continued to be an important Vacaville crop both for feeding livestock in the township and for sale to San Francisco. Remember that even the cities of that time were horse-powered, and there was a ready market for hay producers. Barley was another cash crop, along with oats, rye, corn, and potatoes, and in 1863 several farmers in Pleasants Valley produced sorghum for syrup to sell in the San Francisco market.

By the 1870s cattle and grain had produced great wealth for some producers in the valleys of the township and in the town of Vacaville. However, just as market conditions in the sixties had favored a rise in wheat prices and

Harvesting machine in Vaca Valley



John R. Wolfskill and Susan Wolfskill, who pioneered early fruit production on Putah Creek

demand, changes in the market were bringing the wheat era to an end. Other parts of California began to produce greater quantities of wheat, especially after railroads opened up new acreage to extensive wheat cultivation; European production improved; and new grain-growing regions opened up in other world areas. Although the Vacaville region competed well because of the great fertility of its lands, like all of the farmers of Solano County, Vacaville growers chose to allocate land to other important crops.

"These Pioneers of the Fruit Business"

In the three decades when wheat and cattle were the most profitable businesses, vineyards represented a source of income that offered the hope of replacing grain when prices and acreage declined. Like cattle ranching, viticulture had its beginnings in the Mexican rancho period when John R. Wolfskill first planted Mission grapes from Los Angeles in 1842. The Vacas and Peñas maintained small family vineyards too, both for fresh fruit and for wine. Solano grapes even reached fresh fruit markets in San Francisco and were sold to the mines during the gold rush.

John R. Wolfskill was the one who encouraged early residents of Pleasants Valley to cultivate grapes and fruit trees. In 1851 he gave the Pleasants and M.R. Miller plant cuttings and tools to work the fruit. B.R. Sackett actually planted some 3,000 Mission grapes as early as 1852. These were brought by horseback

from the farm of George Yount in Napa County. Other growers in Pleasants Valley maintained small vineyards and sold fresh grapes to the Sacramento market in the 1850s, but the greater quantities of fruit from the Napa and Sonoma valleys soon saturated the market and prices fell.

The profit potential of grapes and other fruit was real, but it remained to be fulfilled. The **Solano County Herald**, as early as August 23, 1856, editorialized on the potential for "FRUIT":

> We are indebted to Messrs. Wolskill [sic] of the Putah, for some of the finest specimens of fruit that we have seen for many a long day. Grapes, peaches, pears and figs are raised by them in abundance, and all of the finest quality. No pains are spared by Mr. Wolskill in the culture of his fruit, and we are glad that his labor has been so amply rewarded. We hope to see the day that our valleys, in this vicinity, will be one great fruit garden; and to this end, none have contributed more zealously than these pioneers of the fruit business.

In order to deal with the market surplus, growers had to seek alternate techniques. One solution was to use vineyards as a supplementary source of income rather than a major one. E.R. Thurber led others in building wineries as a way to "store" grapes, and M.R. Miller sought new markets for his table grapes. He grafted Muscats to his Mis-

Thurber family members at their ranch in Pleasants Valley

sion vines and produced a profitable table grape as a result. Then, in 1863 and 1864, he made plans to ship his grapes to East Coast markets packed in cork dust obtained in San Francisco. The grapes went by wagon to Suisun, then by sloop to San Francisco, and, finally, by ship via Panama to New York. The delicate grapes did not travel well and arrived bruised and spoiled. This seems to have been the earliest effort of the Pleasants Valley growers to reach national markets from Vacaville township, but Miller had to wait for better transportation facilities to realize his dreams.

By February 9, 1866, the **Weekly Solano Herald** could point with pride to "Wine in Solano." The editor reported that the county assessor had announced that wine makers had produced 21,000 gallons in 1865. More than half the wine was manufactured by two individuals, Mr. Fred Werner and Mr. Josiah Allison of Vacaville. In quality, the wines were said to be unsurpassed by those of other counties, and the quantity that could be produced seemed to be unlimited.

On September 5, 1866, the **Solano Press** also carried an article on "Solano Wine":

> Last Sunday we had the pleasure of visiting the extensive orchard and vineyard of Mr. Josiah Allison, a few miles east of Vacaville. Mr. Allison has probably the largest vineyard in the county—one of forty acres, containing 30,000 vines, and a young vineyard of fifty acres which promises well for the future. The cool and well arranged cellar and the excellent wine contained in it are both well worthy of inspection. The wine has a pleasant, champagne-like taste, peculiar to it alone, which some professed connoisseurs have attributed to excellent flavoring, but Mr. Allison disclaims all "doctoring" practices in his wine making, the liquor being the pure juice of the grape. Its sweet and fascinating flavor is owing to the fact that he allows his grapes to thoroughly ripen before stripping the vines, and besides, the Vacaville climate has many advantages over that of Sonoma and Los Angeles. Mr. Allison will make this year from 8,000 to 10,000 gallons of wine, and can find a ready market for all of it.

In that year, Los Angeles and Sonoma each produced 350,000 gallons of wine, while the rest of California produced another 300,000 gallons.

In addition to the wine a considerable amount of superior brandy was distilled from the "must," and from acidified wines. Unfortunately, the federal tax on brandy was raised that year from fifty

Residence and fields of William Cantelow in Pleasants Valley about 1878, showing why he was a leader in the organization of production in that valley

cents to two dollars a gallon, and growers felt this made the cost of the brandy business impossibly high. That year, sixty-three wine growers from Solano, Napa, Sonoma, and Yolo counties attended a convention in San Francisco to seek a solution from the federal government in the matter, and M. Wolfskill, Josiah Allison, and S.G. McMahon represented Solano. The need to protect their interests continued and led to the formation of the Grape Growers Association of the Counties of Sonoma, Napa, and Solano in 1869.

Grape growers were substantially aided in marketing their products when in 1868 the Central Pacific Railroad was extended through Solano County along a transcontinental route. M.R. Miller now had a second chance at a national market, as the **Weekly Solano Republican** noted on June 22, 1871, citing an article from the Vallejo **Recorder**:

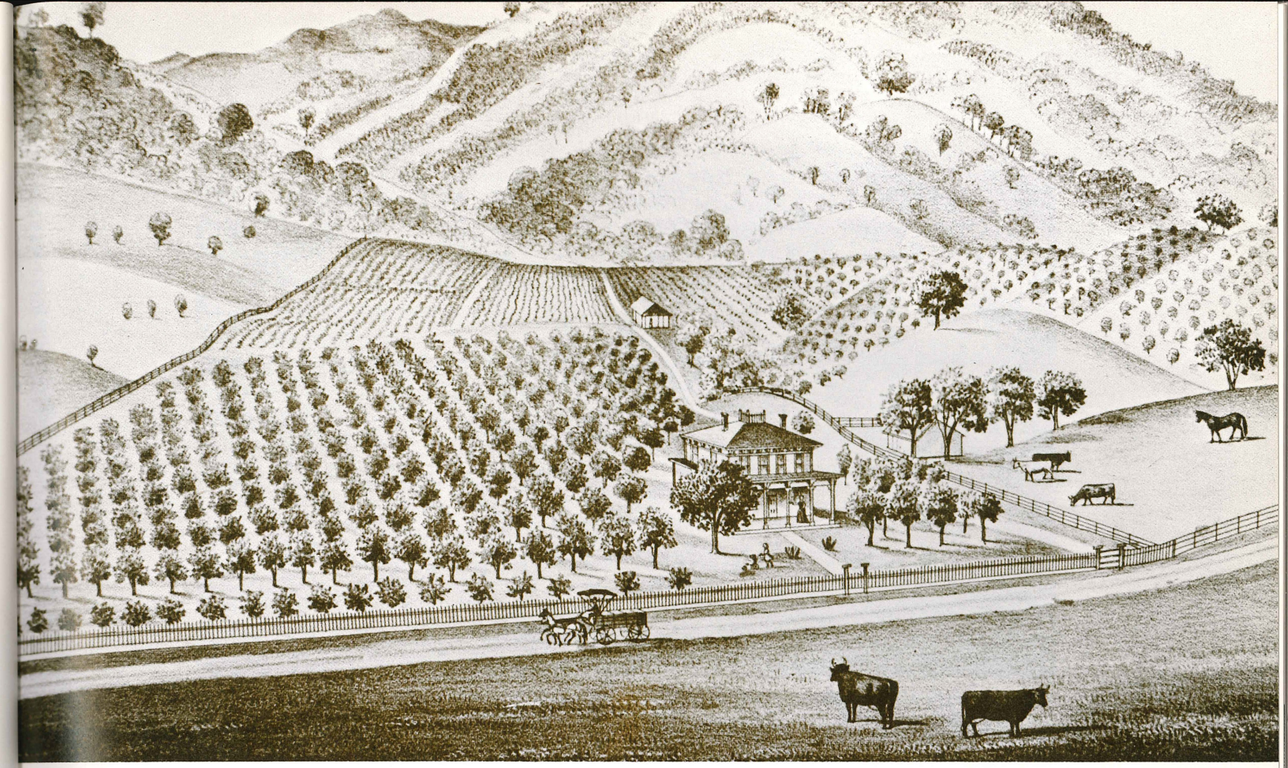
> Pleasant [sic] Valley, situated in the northern portion of this county, is generally noted for sending the first fruit to market in the State. Solano will again take the lead in fruit shipments this year. M.R. Miller of Pleasant Valley has just completed arrangements for the sending of fruit eastward as far as Denver. He will immediately commence forwarding 100 boxes a day. By express to that point it can be sent at the low rate of thirty cents per box, while it costs twenty cents to ship it to San Francisco. Mr. Miller has an orchard and vineyard of 100 acres, which he expects will yield larger this year than ever before. A force of men will constantly be employed in the gathering and packing.

Carloads of fruit became common in the 1870s, and a carload of grapes was sent to the 1876 Centennial Exposition at Philadelphia; half of the grapes came from Pleasants Valley.

> **"Mr. W.H. Miller from San Francisco has for the last week been shipping grapes direct from here to Philadelphia and claims that upon reaching their destination they are in as good condition as when shipped. He transports them by means of his patent ventilator. This ventilator is so constructed that a fan which is constantly kept revolving blows the air over a tank of ice, which keeps everything cold. He claims to have frozen salmon last year by means of this ventilator. Last year he shipped fourteen cars of fruit; this year so far he has shipped but three."**

While cattle and grain production had changed in response to human market activities, for the first time nature—in the form of the pest **phylloxera**—influenced the economy of the Vacaville area. **Phylloxera** were plant lice that attacked the leaves and especially the roots of certain grapevines. Gradually the vineyards sickened and died. Starting in Pleasants Valley, the pests destroyed vineyards there and in Vaca Valley, until only Green Valley survived as a healthy wine-making center.

Deciding to fight back at nature, a few growers, like William Cantelow and Alexander McKevitt, continued to experiment with varieties of vines and rootstalks that would be resistant to **phylloxera**. In later years, they managed to restore the table grape business to Pleasants and Vaca valleys.



L.W. Buck and Anna M. Buck of New York State settled here in 1874 in Pleasants Valley.

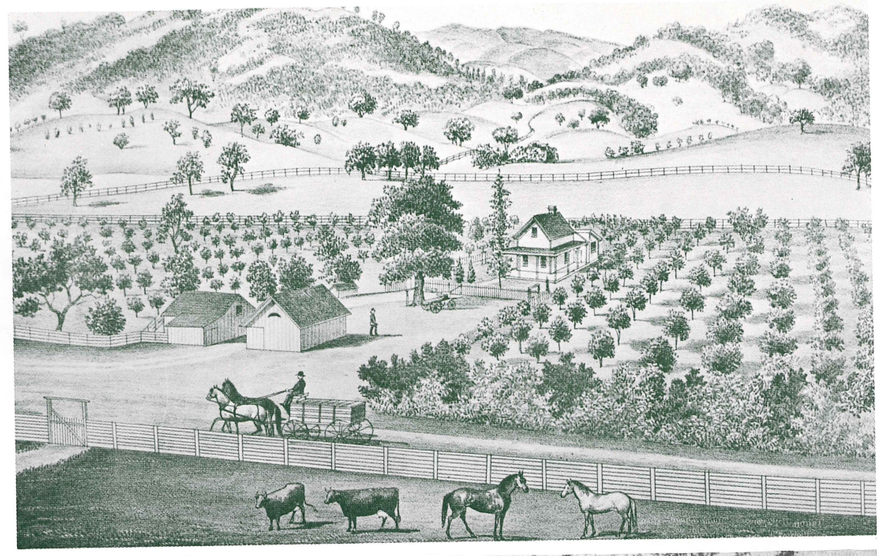
Meanwhile, grapes continued to seek big, rich national markets, although at a reduced level. A good example of this was described in a news item in the **Weekly Solano Republican**, July 31, 1879:

> Mr. L.W. Buck, of Vaca Valley, shipped 250 crates of grapes to Chicago by fast freight on Wednesday. On Friday he will ship a carload. It only takes five days from Sacramento to Chicago.

Grapes were not destined for the major role indicated by their earlier success, and by the time men had fought nature for alternate, resistant varieties, the orchards had become a major and growing occupation for the area, although table grape production continued to be important at the end of the 1870s.

Developing the "Vacaville Fruit Belt"

When grapes did not fulfill their early promise, the search for profitable crops turned to orchards and vegetables during the 1870s. John R. Wolfskill had shown the way with fruit trees in the 1840s, and William and Simpson Thompson began a nursery business in Napa County as early as 1853. About four years later, in



partnership with Ansel W. Putnam and John Dolan, they moved the operation to the upper part of Pleasants Valley where vegetables ripened earlier than other areas. In the meantime, Putnam organized and supervised the construction of a road from Pleasants Valley to the **embarcadero** at Suisun City where produce went on board steamers and sloops. This road facilitated the marketing of delicate vegetables, and it meant that Pleasants, Vaca, and Lagoon valleys had a transportation route to encourage farmers to buy land, produce fruit and vegetables, and seek commercial profits rather than simple self-sufficiency.

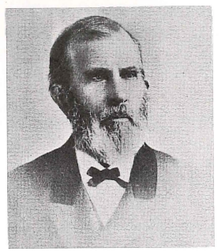
Ansel W. Putnam was one of the really important early horticulturists, a pioneer who showed the way in all phases of the fruit and vegetable business from experimenting and growing to transporting and marketing in the 1850s and early 1860s. The expansion of orchards and gardens was temporarily slowed when profits were lowered by increased fruit production in the mid-1860s, but the opening of the transcontinental railroad in 1868 and the Vacaville line in the following year widened markets for national and international fruit shipments. At the same time, other factors spurred the rising importance of orchard production.

Practical observation of fruit ripening at various locations led to the knowledge that on the hillside slopes at higher levels the same varieties of fruit ripened earlier than at valley levels. Fruit began to occupy both valleys and hillsides, as the advantages of reaching markets with the earliest fruit in the state became known. After the coming of the "iron horse," Vacaville township could market the earliest fruit in the United States in western, midwestern, and eastern markets. Finally, the need for a large supply of cheap labor was supplied by an influx of Chinese workers who provided good labor for no more than one dollar a day.

Above: Bunker Hill Ranch, the Korns residence in Vaca Valley. Below: Dr. and Mrs. W.J. Dobbins out for a buggy ride

At first growers had believed that the best growing conditions were near the mouth of side canyons along the Pleasants and Vaca valleys. In those places, a light wind blowing down the valley at night was usually a way to prevent frost early in the year. When this scarce canyon mouth land ran out, growers moved up the hillsides and found that peaches ripened even earlier than in the bottomland. With good results proven by those who experimented with locating orchards, in the late 1860s and 1870s land in the valleys was increasingly turned to orchards and vineyards when wheat profits began to decline. Some farms in the township set aside lands for growing, but many in the southern part of the area remained primarily planted to wheat in 1879—in Vaca Valley, for example, I.L. Decker, Levi Korns, John Dolan, Jr., G. and N. Baker, R. and W. Long, Alexander McKevitt, J. Wykoff, William Dwyer, J.M. Pepper, Dr. W.J. Dobbins, William Butcher, and Demetrio Peña, all had good grain fields. That year, however, wheat farmers with huge acreages suffered a depression when production

Fruit pioneers (1894). Front left to right: John R. Wolfskill, M.R. Miller, J.M. Pleasants W.R. Gibbs, J. Collins, G.W. Thissell. Back row: W.J. Pleasants, E.R. Thurber, Richard Long, E. Rust.



Left: H.A. Bassford, born in Benicia, moved to Sunny Dale farm in Lagoon Valley in 1868. Middle and right: The J.M. Robinsons crossed the plains by wagon in 1853 to homestead in Vaca Valley.

rose in California and profits fell.

Many men and women led in the development of the Vacaville fruit district. M.R. Miller added apples, peaches, and figs to his early vineyards in Pleasants Valley in 1856, and his white Smyrna figs were said to be the first to be brought to market in San Francisco (1863). As early as 1863 W.W. Smith turned grain bottomland in Vaca Valley to cherry cultivation, and he had cherries ready for market by March 31 in later years. E.R. Thurber led the expansion of orchards up the Pleasants Valley hillsides for even earlier ripening of fruit, and William Cantelow of Vaca Valley was credited with locating his orchards in the English Hills where early cultivation was excellent. By 1879, a number of Vaca Valley farmers had outstanding fruit and vegetable farms—Josiah A. Allison, John Dolan, Sr., Mrs. Margaret Pierson (a 39-year-old widow of Louis Pierson who was herself from Ireland), Charles Martell, L.W. Buck, John Huckins, J.M. Robinson, R.D. Dobbins, J.B. Collins, J. Conley, Robert Parke, A. Steiger, J.V. Stark, H.A. Schroeder, J.W. Gates, and J. Poiser. Lagoon Valley cherry growers had reached prominence by that time too, and led by J.M. Bassford, the best cherries in the county came from Henry Bassford, George F. Barker, Dr. J.M. Hubbard, D. W. Adcock, and G.W. Plaisted.

An excellent account of many of these people and a brief sketch of their activities can be found in two newspaper accounts in the **Weekly Solano Republican**. On May 8, 1879, there is an extensive article on Pleasants Valley and Vaca Valley roadside farms entitled "On the Wing. A Trip through Pleasant and Vaca Valleys—Vacaville—The Fruit and Grain Crop Prospects—Description of Farms, Orchards, Etc., Etc." The same paper on June 12, 1879, describes "The Cherry Orchards" of Lagoon Valley in quite good detail. What is striking is not the listing of the places described, but rather the concentration of growth in the few families of the township. Of course, there were other growers and grazers not mentioned, but this list of those living along the road alone is most impressive.

One item in the **Solano Republican** article of May 8, 1879, is worth recounting, even though it is very brief. In Vaca Valley, the reporter passed the property of W.W. Smith and remarked that "there are 52 acres . . . devoted almost exclusively to fruit trees and vines and . . . rented by Chinamen." The growth of the presence of Chinese laborers and merchants can be seen by reading the enumerations of the national ten-year censuses. In the state census of 1852, there were no Chinese in the future Vacaville township region, but in 1860 there

	Population	Chinese	% Population
Vacaville (town)	361	25	6.9
Vacaville (township)	938	209	22.3
	1,299	234	18.0

appeared two Chinese laborers and in 1870 the number rose to 171 in a population of 1,701.

By 1880, the impact of Chinese laborers was significant. They continued to work mainly on township farms, but they were also cooks and laundrymen, and two were listed as "huckster," or peddler of wares or fruit and vegetables.

Chinese labor had grown to nearly a fifth of the populations by 1880, and their labor was a most important contribution to the growth of the fruit business. Finally, it is interesting to note that by that year, 332 people in the township had been born in California, 234 in China, and the next largest groups were from Missouri (53), New York (48), Ireland (31), and Ohio (25). By 1880, the Chinese were the second largest segment of the population.

Varieties of Fruit

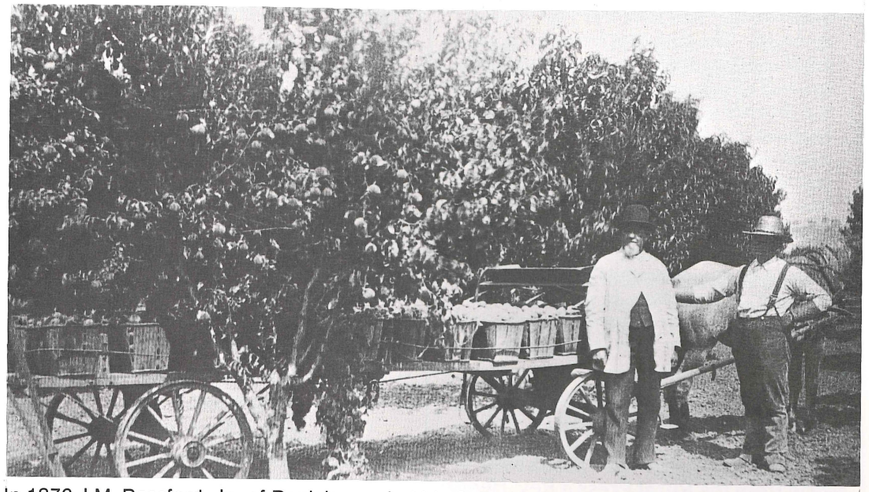
The May 8 article that mentioned the increase of Chinese labor also made useful observations about "The Crops":

> The crop prospect in that section is simply immense. The grain crop could not look better, and judging from the present outlook, there will be a heavy yield this year. The outlook for fruit is very encouraging indeed. The trees are fairly groaning under their burden, and we noticed limbs which had broken off owing to the amount of fruit on them. Apricots will be ripe in another month, and then the rush of shipping will begin. We were informed that from 100 to 150 tons of fruit were shipped daily from Vacaville during some months of the year. This will give a person some idea of the amount of fruit grown in that section.

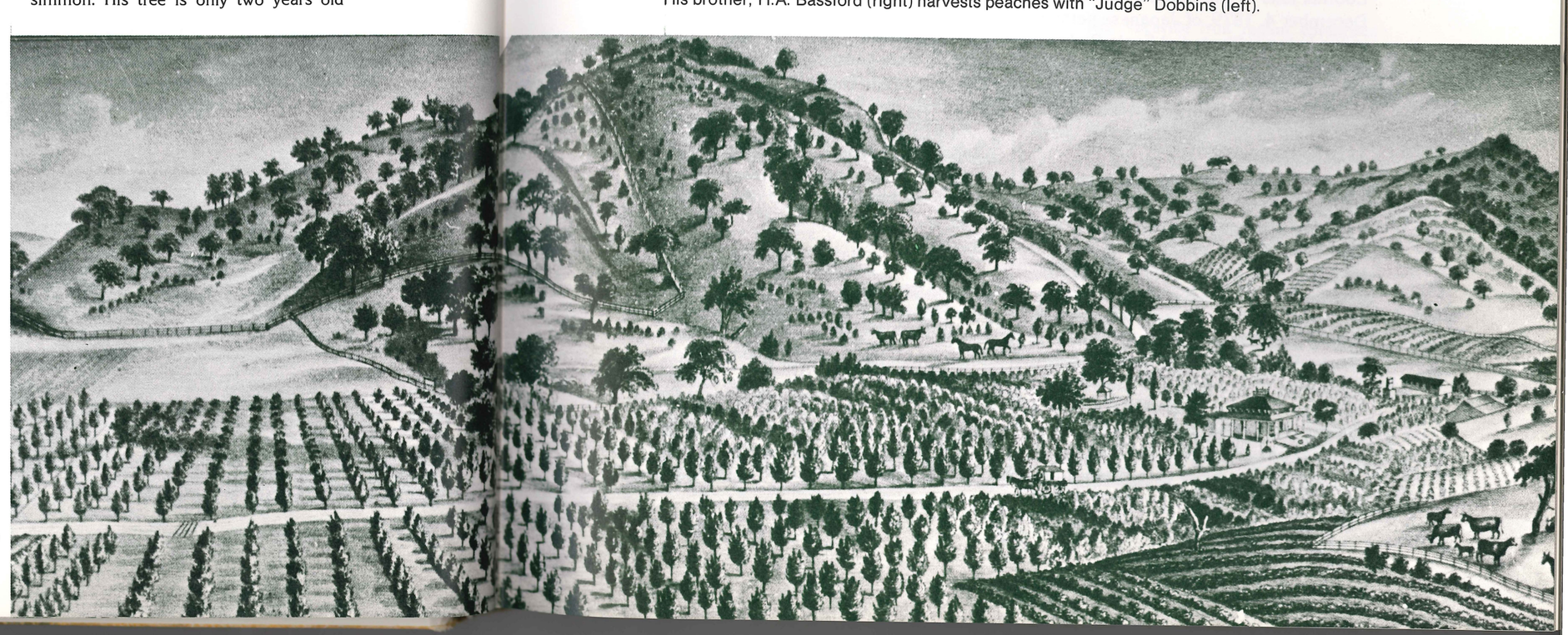
The abundance and productivity is clear, but what fruit are they talking about?

In addition to grains and ordinary vegetables, the Vacaville township farmers experimented with an interesting number and variety of more exotic crops: yams, flax, hemp, tobacco, cotton, rice, peanuts, sugar cane, olives, figs, pomegranates, prickly pears, pineapples, mulberries, almonds, walnuts, oranges, lemons, and what were called the "first and only" date palms in the United States to ripen their fruit in full perfection. There were other experiments, too, like that described in the **Weekly Solano Republican**, November 20, 1879:

> We have been presented by Mr. Robert Parke, of Vacaville, with a fine specimen of the new fruit known as the Japanese persimmon. His tree is only two years old



In 1876 J.M. Bassford, Jr., of Benicia married Ida C. Barker and moved to "Cherry Glen" farm. His brother, H.A. Bassford (right) harvests peaches with "Judge" Dobbins (left).



from the bud and bore this year 150 persimmons. The fruit is a beautiful golden color and is in shape very much similar to the fruit of the same name which grows in the Mississippi valley. The taste is very pleasant and agreeable. Mr. Parke made a small shipment to the city [San Francisco], and this is the first of this fruit which has been sent to market from Solano County and but little has ever been sent from any other section of the State. Mr. Parke has demonstrated that this fruit can be grown successfully in our valleys, and we hope to see our orchardists taking hold of the matter in real earnest another season.

Experimentation and innovation were important values to orchardists of those formative years in California. Citing an article from the **Rural Press** a Rev. Henry Loomis tells in the **Solano Republican**, December 4, 1879, of Japanese persimmons being cultivated at Santa Barbara, San Rafael, and Ross Valley. But, he concludes that "unless someone knows otherwise, to Mr. Parke must be awarded the credit of first marketing the Japanese persimmon."

Five major fruits were developed by 1880, each of them in a great number of varieties. The apple and peach were early favorites, but the warm winter weather was too much for the apple. The apricot and peach replaced it as the most popular fruits. The table grape was a fourth crop of great importance, followed by the cherry. Peaches in great variety ripened from May to October in a long harvest season, while apricots ripened over a one-month period starting in late May. Cherries usually ripened in late March to reach the market before any other cherries that were grown in California.

Solano County had three main cherry-growing regions, the first of which was developed by J.M. Bassford in 1868. He came to Lagoon Valley from Napa in search of an area where cherries would ripen earlier. At a small canyon opening, he found the fruit matured earlier than on adjacent farms, and there he established the place known later as Cherry Glen. From there he led his neighbors in developing a remarkable cherry-growing region. In later decades, Rockville and Green Valley also came to have fine cherry-growing areas.

There were other minor fruit trees grown, too: figs, especially the Smyrna and Mission varieties; oranges and lemons; and the English walnut, all introduced in the 1850s, and Kelsey plums from Japan, introduced by D.E. Hough in 1870. This particular stock was used later by Luther Burbank and others to derive new varieties of plums.

As a matter of fact, William Bowen, in a thesis on Solano County fruit culture, summarizes a sampling of some of the better known varieties of the leading fruits, and their originators in Vacaville Township.

The future possibilities for fruit crops seemed limitless and global in their possible impact as was highlighted in a column on "Apricots" in the **Weekly Solano Republican** of October 1, 1880:

> Fruit growers have lately come to the conclusion that the apricot is the most profitable fruit that can be raised. They have found that the demand is so great that the business cannot be overdone, and that the yield is so prolific that all the way from $400 to $600 per acre can be made with them. In England, there is a great demand for the apricot to be used in provisioning ships, as it is found to be the best preventive of scurvy. So large was the English demand this year, according to a San Francisco merchant, that the orders from London and Liverpool alone would more than have exhausted the entire crop of the State. There are but a few places in the world where this fruit has become successfully raised, but the valleys in this county are well adapted to its culture and the yield is very prolific. Indeed, it is asserted that Solano county alone produces more than one-half of the apricots raised in this State.

	Variety	Originator
Apricots:	Allison	Josiah A. Allison, Vaca Valley
	Thissell Seedling	G.W. Thissell, Pleasants Valley
	Triumph	W.W. Smith, Vaca Valley
Peaches:	Buck	L.W. Buck, Vaca Valley
	Decker	Sol Decker, Pleasants Valley
	Early Imperial	W.W. Smith, Vaca Valley
	Gate's Cling	J.W. Gates, Vaca Valley
	Grover Cleveland	J.W. Gates, Vaca Valley
	McKevitt Cling	M.R. Miller Ranch, Pleasants Valley
	Lovall	G.W. Thissell Ranch, Pleasants Valley
	Muir	G.W. Thissell Ranch, Pleasants Valley
	Thissell	G.W. Thissell Ranch, Pleasants Valley
	Ulatis	Not known
Plums:	Amador	Millard Sharp, Vaca Valley
	Anita	Millard Sharp, Vaca Valley
	Methley	Millard Sharp, Vaca Valley
	Raisin	Millard Sharp, Vaca Valley
	California Blue	W.W. Smith, Vaca Valley

The same newspaper on December 31, 1880, published a column on "The Vacaville Fruit Belt," the earliest newspaper reference found to that title. It stated that:

> The Vacaville fruit region comprises Vaca and Pleasant valleys, and the low hills bordering them. It extends from Vacaville to Putah Creek, and is some twelve miles in length, with a width of from one to three miles. . . . of first class fruit land there is not more than 8,000 acres.

They could well have added Lagoon Valley with its cherries and other fruits, but it was still an incredibly small region to have so broad an impact on fruit markets.

Excitement over the prospects for early fruit production had reached new heights by the 1880–1881 season, and the **Weekly Solano Republican** showed the new fruit fever in a column on November 18, 1881:

> The past season has shown the great superiority of the Vacaville Fruit Belt over all other sections of the State in the keeping qualities of its fruits. So great is the

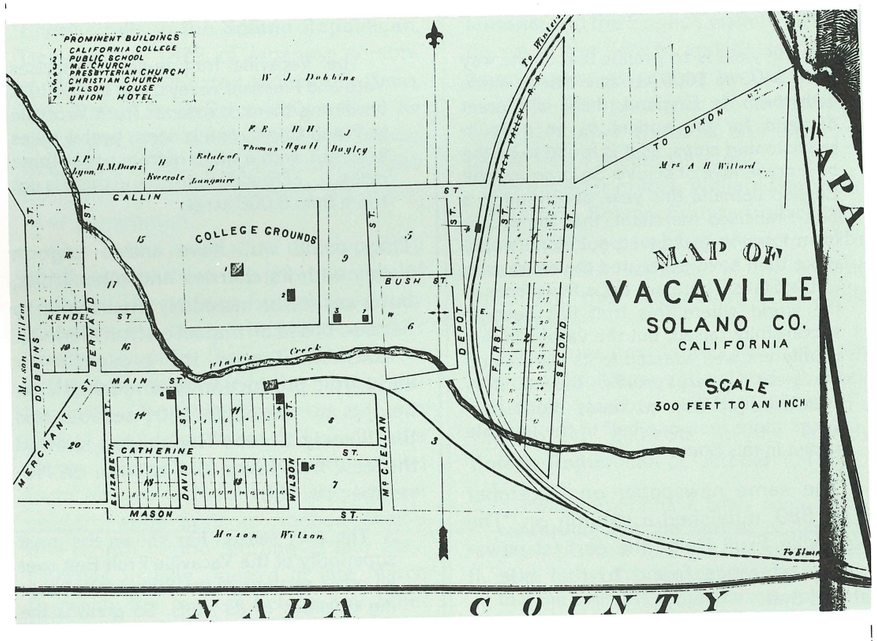
difference in this respect that, during the last season, grapes grown at Vacaville sold in Denver and Chicago for good prices, while grapes, grown upon irrigated vines, arrived in such bad order as to be totally unmarketable. . . . The firmness, and pulp character of fruit grown in this dry climate, without irrigation, will, no doubt, make the Vacaville Fruit Belt headquarters for the supply of the Eastern markets. . . . In fact, the railroads make us market gardeners for Chicago and New York, as well as San Francisco.

At last, the township had developed its commercial production, had discovered significant markets, and had laid the base for a productive economy to support the town of Vacaville as the trade, service, and transportation center for the earliest fruit district in the nation.

The Town Starts to Grow

Starting with only two buildings and a handful of pioneer settlers in 1851, the town of Vacaville grew modestly and, at times, painfully to a town of seventy-one families with a total population of 361 people by June 1880. In the township outside there were only 141 more families with 938 people. It is striking that so tiny a group of people could generate such a progressive and productive society.

The one square mile **villa** originated out of the desire of Juan Manuel Vaca to



perpetuate his family name on a piece of centrally located land in the Los Putos Rancho grant that he shared with Juan Felipe Peña. Early plats of the town show the streets to be named in Spanish—for example, Los Santes, Madelina, Encarnación, Raymunda, Nueva México, Benicia, Santa Lucía, and Solano. The 1850 census taken by Mizner shows a seven-year-old Raymunda Vaca girl in the Tiofilo Vaca residence, and there is a Madalina Vaca, a thirty-seven-year-old female heading up another household in that year. So, apparently, members of the family of Don Juan Manuel were honored in street names too.

But, of course, it was the intention of William McDaniel and Lansing B. Mizner to create an Anglo town and township, so the Spanish street names were never used. Instead, Vacaville became a small rural trade and service center with a few structures that mainly served travelers between the Bay Area and Sacramento.

The region developed slowly until 1858, when the United States patent was granted to give clear title to the Putos grant for Vaca and Peña on June 4. Before then land titles in all but Pleasants Valley were not clear and capital investment in and on the land was risky. After 1852 Suisun City with its **embarcadero** was the nearest commercial and transportation center, and Fairfield got the county seat in 1858. They were about ten miles by road from Vacaville, but local farmers and merchants were more closely tied to those other two more prosperous neighboring towns than to their own Vacaville.

The need for access to waterways at Suisun City was the key factor in holding back the growth of Vacaville in the early days when passengers and cargo were moved most easily and cheaply by steamship, sloop, and barge out on to the Sacramento River or through Suisun Bay to the ocean. This remained the situation until 1868 and 1869 when Vacaville got direct access to the new railroads. Before that time, Vacaville served the Sacramento road travelers who suffered the rough and dusty summer roads and winter mud. The **Solano County Herald** (August 21, 1858) put it well in a letter from Suisun City:

> Business here is quite lively. Large quantities of grain is [sic] daily brought in and sold or stored. Suisun and Vaca Valley are hard to beat in the way of an abundant production of grain. Give us clear land titles and this would be a little Eden in all that could be desired to make a man comfortable and happy.

In the fall of 1857 the **Herald** (September 26, 1857) described "A Tour Through the County":

> Vaca Valley . . . that quiet and romantic valley, apparently shut out from the world and its cares. Thriving farms are on both sides of the road clear up to the village of Vacaville, where a cluster of houses are collected—enough, no doubt, for the present wants of its citizens. Beyond, as well as above and below the town appears to be well settled up, and the whole country has the aspect of quiet composure.

Actually, by 1858 there was a single developed street in the center of town along the Sacramento road. The street held two stores, several saloons, a hotel, the Ulatus Academy, blacksmith and

wagon shops, and several buildings.

By the end of 1858 the Vaca-Peña land grant was cleared up, and land was being purchased and businesses built; the tempo of change was picking up. By 1860 the area had grown to include six hotel proprietors, thirty-three physicians, eighteen ministers, twelve school teachers, twenty merchants, four saloon keepers, two printers, an attorney, and a barber by the name of R. Gorden from Tennessee. Vacaville Township was the most populous of the seven Solano townships with 1,831 people and a growing town.

The rising prosperity of grain, grapes, and the new orchard and garden production of the three valleys in the 1860s brought a greater concentration of goods, services, and families to Vacaville. By 1870, 346 people lived in Vacaville, which boasted seventy-six buildings. The town had settled down from its earlier influx of professionals, and it had a stable corps of four physicians, two clergymen, one school teacher, two professors and a president at the Pacific Methodist College, two saloon keepers, five grocers, five clerks, two merchants, and various tradesmen—thirty-six occupations in all.

As the 1870s began, Vacaville had every reason to expect an even greater decade of expansion of citizens and homes, commercial wealth, and development of the town in response to the prosperity of the surrounding township, which flourished economically as never before. The **Weekly Solano Republican** (September 18, 1873) reported that a

An early Vacaville blacksmith shop

San Francisco newspaper had given

> a very favorable notice of Vacaville as a place of residence. It is healthy; the climate is remarkably fine; it is located in an exceedingly rich section of the country furnishing the earliest fruits and vegetables of any portion of the State; property is offered at low figures and is on the advance; society is good, "considering the population, we know of no place that can boast of more good, high-toned citizens"; the village is "unsurpassed for its good order and high moral tone"; and the "educational facilities present the very strongest argument" in its favor.

The Methodists had sold their college property to the Baptists, who opened the California College in 1871 and continued the tradition of higher education in Vacaville. The Vaca Valley Railroad continued to grow and expand, as it attracted more and more wealth to the town. Life was,

indeed, paying good dividends for a citizenry in the process of making its presence felt in the county, the state, and the huge metropolitan centers of the nation.

Disaster Strikes and Strikes Again

In the midst of plenty, the first great tragedy in its early history struck Vacaville on June 5, 1877, as described in detail in the **Weekly Solano Republican** of June 7 in an account of "VACAVILLE IN ASHES." A fire broke out in the barn of Mrs. Luzena Wilson on the southwestern edge of town in the late afternoon. A stiff breeze carried fire brands to other buildings, including the Southern Methodist Church a quarter of a mile away, and "in a twinkling the whole line of buildings from the blacksmith shop to the bridge were enveloped in flames." The total destruction amounted to $54,000, and half the business section was destroyed.

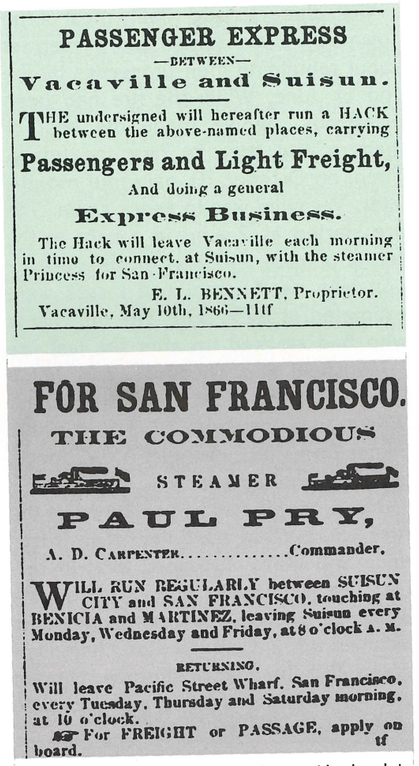
The cause of the fire was unknown, although there were suspicions cast at some "tramps" along with a rumor that "a band of gipseys told several parties the day before that a fire would break out in this barn and sweep the town." What was certain was that there were no ladders, buckets, water, or anything in the downtown area to fight the fire on the dry roofs, and even the furniture that was removed to the street was burned for lack of water to protect it. Some people saved their buildings by covering walls and roofs with wet blankets or water from windmill tanks, but Mrs. Wilson and A.E. Ward were heavy losers.

With characteristic vitality most of the downtown businessmen and women set about rebuilding their properties by the end of June. While the fire had been disastrous, people made the best of matters and tried to face the future. Then, on October 10, only four months later, Vacaville was in ashes again. The fire started at 2 a.m. in a barn at the center of town, and this time the destruction was nearly total and losses were estimated at $250,000! The merchants who had stocked up after the last fire —Mansfield and Theodore, and Jacob Blum—lost the most, followed by Mrs. Wilson again, druggist J.D. Tilson, stable owner Dan Corn, druggist A. W. Vance, and Dr. Cunningham.

Many people had been insured for the first fire, but few continued their insurance and many sustained total losses. Druggist Vance was one exception. He was over-insured, and as a result he was arrested and investigated on charges of arson. But the district attorney released him for want of evidence, and the cause of the fire was never known.

Again most of the townspeople rebuilt, although more slowly this time and with less facility. The **Weekly Solano Republican** (November 29, 1877) commented:

> Since the Vacavillė fire business men have to economize all the available space in the few buildings still remaining. In one small building about 20 x 40 with only one slight partition, there is at present a telegraph and express office; Dr. Tilson's drug store, Dr. Harding's dental office; Gates and Long's butcher shop, and in the basement there is a barber shop and a residence. This is piling them in nearly as



PASSENGER EXPRESS
—BETWEEN—
Vacaville and Suisun.

THE undersigned will hereafter run a HACK between the above-named places, carrying

Passengers and Light Freight,

And doing a general

Express Business.

The Hack will leave Vacaville each morning in time to connect, at Suisun, with the steamer Princess for San Francisco.

E. L. BENNETT, Proprietor.
Vacaville, May 10th, 1866—11tf

FOR SAN FRANCISCO.
THE COMMODIOUS
STEAMER
PAUL PRY,
A. D. CARPENTER.....Commander.

WILL RUN REGULARLY between SUISUN CITY and SAN FRANCISCO, touching at BENICIA and MARTINEZ, leaving Suisun every Monday, Wednesday and Friday, at 6 o'clock A. M.

RETURNING,

Will leave Pacific Street Wharf, San Francisco, every Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday morning, at 10 o'clock.

☞ For FREIGHT or PASSAGE, apply on board. tf

Vacaville travelers and goods went by hack to Suisun and on to San Francisco by steamer.

thick as sardines or three in a bed, and it must be like a bee-hive when all happen to drive a brisk trade at the same time.

On December 20 the **Republican** noted that:

> Compared with its former appearance Vacaville presents a very desolate appearance. Some of the unfortunate parties have rebuilt, but it takes time for a small village like Vacaville to recuperate from a double scourge.

But recuperate it did, and by 1880 the little town of 361 people was back on its feet, seeking new residents, and ready for the exciting expansion of the region into prominence as an early fruit supplier to the largest markets of the nation.

It is interesting to wonder what might have been the result if the two fires of 1877 had struck the town before the opening of the Vaca Valley Railroad Company and the heady fruit boom of the 1870s. Would there have been enough wealth and promise of economic rewards to overcome the double disaster? That it is unlikely should be amply illustrated by the story of the rise of the railroad business in Vacaville.

Importance of the Railroad

As early as 1857, William B. Cole started a daily line of stages between Suisun City and Vacaville, and in the following year McKenzie and Brown's Sacramento and Napa stage line linked the area through Vacaville and Putah Creek to Suisun. The M. Cutler and Brother Line had another stage connection to Benicia, and along these routes passengers and light freight could reach the waterways to Sacramento, Stockton, and San Francisco. In later years, men like E.L. Bennett and Milton Cutler served Vacaville travelers with stage runs to Suisun for a fare of $1.00 each way. A return trip from, say Woodland, to San Francisco by steamer took ten hours, leaving at 4 a.m., reaching the city by 2 p.m., and returning the following day. During that decade from 1857 to 1868, announcements and incomplete plans for various short railroad lines were launched from time to time, but no railroad emerged and fruit and grain merchants were tied to water transportation and to Suisun City as the intermediate contact point for most of the business that was conducted.

In 1868 the construction of the California Pacific Railroad across Solano County brought a tremendous change, because it not only offered an alternative to water transportation, but it also linked California with eastern cities when the California Pacific and the Union Pacific linked up at Promontory, Utah, on May 10, 1869. Landlocked towns like Vacaville now had the opportunity to develop in their own right, using the "iron horse" to reach ever greater markets.

One month earlier, a momentous decision was taken at Vacaville to bring railroading to the town. The **Weekly Solano Herald** told the story on April 10, 1869:

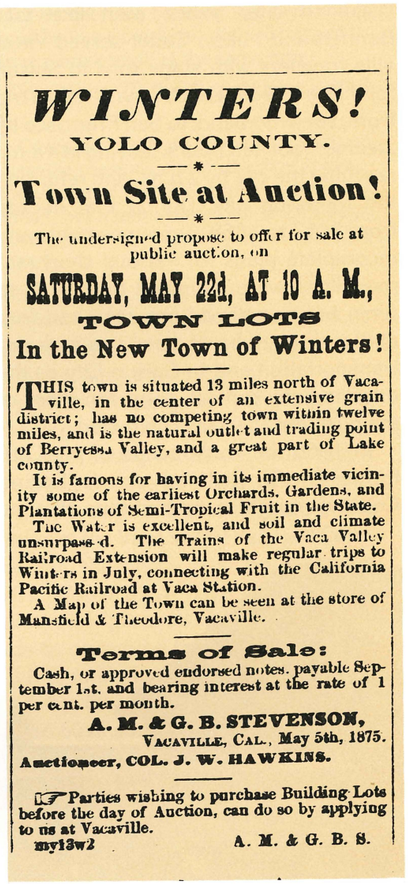
> Mason Wilson (President), Richard Thompson (Secretary), A.P. Bernard (Treasurer), A.C. Hawkins, G.B. Stevenson, William B. Davis, G.F. Barker, E.R. Thurber, Joshua Donaldson, M.R. Miller, Thomas J. Jeans and Moses Blum were

The Vaca Valley Railroad Company provided an extremely important impetus to the town's growth after 1869.

last Saturday [April 3] elected Directors of the Vaca Valley Railroad Company. On taking the chair, President Wilson addressed the Board on the importance and flattering prospects of the undertaking. He stated that $25,000 was subscribed to the capital stock, leaving but $10,000 or $12,000 to be taken of the full amount required. He felt assured that the enterprise was favorably regarded by the managers of the California P.R.R., from whom hostility had been apprehended. This he regarded as but the beginning of a grand sub-central line, destined ere long to extend to Berryessa Valley and thence northward, affording a ready and cheap outlet for the immense agricultural and mineral treasures of upper Napa and Lake County. The country, settled by a large population, would thereby be rendered valuable and pour its abounding tribute into the lap of Vacaville.

With this action, a group of enterprising property owners, grain farmers, orchardists, and merchants, headed by the owner of the Mason House hotel and other Vacaville property, confidently determined to seize the trade initiative from Suisun City and "corner the market" in the northern part of the county as penetration of adjacent northern farmlands continued into the 1870s.

Mason Wilson had predicted expansion to new centers, and this soon began to take place. By mid-April, the railroad was planned to connect with the California Pacific at Vaca Station, five miles away. It was a fateful decision that led to the growth of Vaca Station and its later separation from Vacaville Township in 1871 to form Elmira Township. In July 1869 the leadership of the railroad was changed to add A.M. Stevenson as vice-president, J.D. Tilson as secretary, A.P. Bernard as treasurer, and Moses Blum as another director. In 1870 the Stevenson brothers took control of the railroad.



WINTERS!

YOLO COUNTY.

—*—

Town Site at Auction!

—*—

The undersigned propose to offer for sale at public auction, on

SATURDAY, MAY 22d, AT 10 A. M.,

TOWN LOTS

In the New Town of Winters!

THIS town is situated 13 miles north of Vacaville, in the center of an extensive grain district; has no competing town within twelve miles, and is the natural outlet and trading point of Berryessa Valley, and a great part of Lake county.

It is famous for having in its immediate vicinity some of the earliest Orchards, Gardens, and Plantations of Semi-Tropical Fruit in the State.

The Water is excellent, and soil and climate unsurpassed. The Trains of the Vaca Valley Railroad Extension will make regular trips to Winters in July, connecting with the California Pacific Railroad at Vaca Station.

A Map of the Town can be seen at the store of Mansfield & Theodore, Vacaville.

Terms of Sale:

Cash, or approved endorsed notes, payable September 1st, and bearing interest at the rate of 1 per cent. per month.

A. M. & G. B. STEVENSON,

VACAVILLE, CAL., May 5th, 1875.

Auctioneer, COL. J. W. HAWKINS.

☞ Parties wishing to purchase Building Lots before the day of Auction, can do so by applying to us at Vacaville.

my13w2 A. M. & G. B. S.

By 1875, the line was extended thirteen miles to Putah Creek and the town of Winters was created. In 1877, another extension of twelve miles was made to Cache Creek at the town of Madison, which also was created because of the extension of the Vaca Valley Railroad, now about fifty miles long. By 1879, the company was renamed The Vaca Valley and Clear Lake Railroad; it had been instrumental in creating three new important town centers; it served a number of freight depots and sidings at those towns and at Hartley, Allendale, Ely's, and Scott's, and in all the expansion, the managers claimed only one Chinese worker was lost.

A new day and a new base for Vacaville had emerged in the complex combination of capital from agricultural lands, town property owners, merchants, and railroad interests. This meant stability for the town, even in the face of total devastation by fire in 1877. It also meant the decline of an old "pioneer" way of life and the rise of the new world of the "iron horse" with all the changes, advantages, and disadvantages that this brought to the town and township. The new force would soon be popularly known as "the octopus"; it would be praised and vilified in California literature. But the solid community base represented by the passenger and freight business of the Vaca Valley Railroad Company was an underpinning for Vacaville at the end of the 1870s.

On May 8, 1879, the **Weekly Solano Republican,** describing Pleasants and Vaca valleys and Vacaville, could comment that:

> Vacaville is a beautiful place, and surrounded as it is with such an extensive farming section, it is a most excellent point for trade, and the stores there carry very heavy stocks of goods. Although two years have now elapsed since the fire first paid it two visits in rapid succession, there is not a trace remaining of the fierce conflagration.

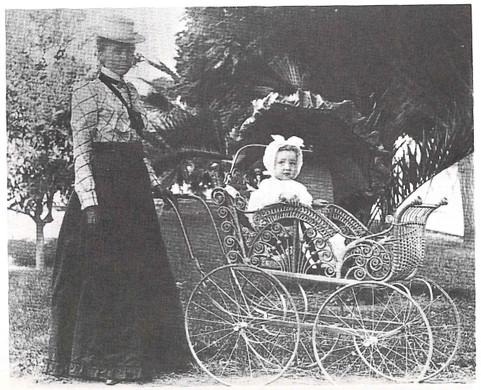
A good description of the town, its major businesses, California College, and brief mention of the railroad company follow before the correspondent tells the readers that:

> There may be some points of interest which we overlooked, and some farms or persons not mentioned, which let us assure all, has been purely accidental, and not intentional.

How could anyone disagree with a wise statement like that!

One final question can be raised. What was the extent of the markets to which this community and town reached out over the transcontinental railroads? Some idea of this can be gained by looking at the main markets mentioned on previous pages. Denver was the smallest town with 35,629 population in 1880. New York City, with 1,206,299 people, was the largest city in the United States. The second largest city was Philadelphia with 847,170 people, and Chicago was fourth in the nation with 503,185 residents. Even nearby San Francisco, with 233,959 people, was ninth in size in the country. With a total population of 2,826,242 in these cities which Vacaville fruit reached among the earliest shipments each year, one can understand the heady excitement of those who produced, sold, and transported the fruit to such big and wealthy metropolitan centers.

Social Life in Town and Township



From 1851 to 1880, the Vacaville region underwent a transformation in the nature and organization of its people and their customs. People from all the major continents except Africa poured into the township and into Vacaville itself. At the same time, the Mexican rancho families became a smaller and smaller part of the community—although still an important group—and the Southern Patwin were clearly gone forever from the land. Chinese laborers appeared for the first time.

The dominant population was Anglo-oriented; they wanted schools and colleges, and they were willing to pay for them with their time and their financial support. They worked hard all day, and they thrived on social activity at every opportunity—in their schools and colges, churches, fraternal organizations, and passing amusements like circuses, musical performances, and local talent. They suffered their share of crime and violent accidents. By 1880, they sensed that the day of the "old settler" had passed, and a new path lay before them.

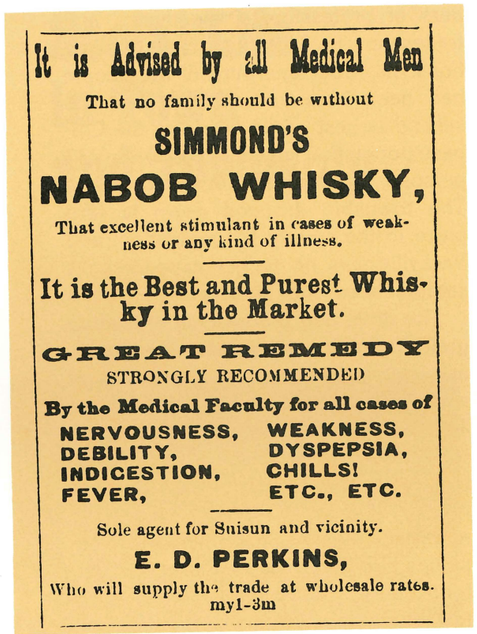
The People

In the 1850s in Vacaville and its surrounding valleys, the adults came mainly from New Mexico, Baja California, Missouri, Kentucky, and Virginia, and some of the younger children had been born in Alta California. By 1860 Vacaville township had the largest population in the county; they came from thirty-three states of the United States, from twelve European countries, and from Canada, Latin America, China, and India. The largest single group had been born in California. Four black men appeared in the census, along with two Chinese laborers and one Indian baby listed in a white family household: the only Indian listed in the town and township censuses from 1850 through 1880.

In 1866, the township had been subdivided to create Silveyville and Maine Prairie townships, and in 1870 the nature of its 1,701 people was changing with the rise of commercial agriculture and the wheat and fruit culture. While in 1860 two-thirds of the people were farmers in individual households, in 1870 there were about 18 percent farmers, with farm laborers rising to nearly 70 percent of the people. The number of foreign countries and of American states represented remained almost the same as in 1860, but native born Californians were growing larger in numbers as the years passed. Two new groups were rising in percentage of the population: there were 171 Chinese, mostly agricultural laborers and mostly males, and they were now the third largest segment of the people; and there were 81 Irish laborers who were the fourth largest group in the township. No blacks were listed in that census.

Vaca Station, later named Elmira Township, was created out of part of Vacaville in 1871, and by 1880 Vacaville township had settled down to a population of 1,299 people, with 361 living in the town of Vacaville. In the township, there were 352 laborers to about 126 farmers and orchardists, and in Vacaville itself there were a handful of farmers, thirty to forty laborers, and small numbers of professionals, merchants, and tradesmen in forty-five main occupations. In 1880, one-third of the people had been born in California, and the second largest group was now the Chinese population which had grown to 237 persons, or 18 percent of the township. The township dropped down to fifth place in the county by population, and Vacaville was no longer expanding its settlement or its population.

The drive and productivity of leading grain farmers, orchardists, merchants, and railroaders produced a group of wealthy individuals by the 1860s and 1870s. The newspapers called these wealthy men "Nabobs," a term taken from a Hindu word for very rich men. From 1863 to 1874, the Suisun City newspapers listed those men and companies that were assessed over $10,000 for tax purposes, and Vacaville, town and township, always had a sizable group in the county listings. Some twenty-eight Vacaville people were mentioned in that twelve-year period, and, by 1874, the largest income was that of William J. Dobbins (farmer), followed by David Dutton (farmer), William Butcher (farmer), Mason Wilson (hotel operator and property holder), A.C. Hawkins (farmer), A.M. and G.B. Stevenson (railroad), Gates and Long (livestock), Jacob and Moses Blum (merchants), and José Demetrio Peña (farmer). Four Peñas appeared on the listing, as did another New Mexican pioneer, Antonio M. Esquivel (who came in 1866 to Vaca Valley), but no one from the Vaca family appeared in the listings. Orchardists like



Josiah Allison, William Cantelow, and E.R. Thurber began to appear after 1869, as the fruit business entered its early productive phase. The assessed income of these people tended to double in that period, as the Vacaville area grew and prospered. By and large, along with politicians, preachers, and educators, all these nabobs were the leaders of every phase of community life. It is important to emphasize the fact that the wives of these men also were constantly and deeply involved with their individual families and with the community—in educational activity, in parties, holiday festivities, church organization, fraternal associations, as well as in business and farming labors. There was no separate history for women; they made history along with their husbands and the community.

Early Education

One of the earliest and certainly one of the major social concerns after 1851 was to provide education for the growing influx of families. James W. Anderson of Vacaville was the second superintendent of schools for Solano County in 1855 and 1856, at a time in which the main objective of the superintendent was to get the children of the early families into public school. In 1855, he announced to the public that there were 641 children between four and eighteen years of age, 305 of whom were attending school and that schools had been organized in all the townships except Montezuma and Tremont.

Superintendent Anderson would have been gratified at the time had he realized that at the end of a quarter of a century the school census of 1879 would show 4,785 Solano County school children in forty-eight different school districts. In Vacaville township by that date there were six school districts with some 380 students, about equally divided between boys and girls. The smallest school was in Lagoon District with 28 and Ulatis with 201 was the largest. The other schools were Alamo, Oak Dale, Peaceful Glen, and Pleasants Valley. The rural schools in the township had small enrollments and the leading men of the districts served as trustees.

Charles Edward Anson Markham was the most famous student to attend one of these small schools and then go on to gain a national and international reputation as a poet. Much later in life he adopted the name Edwin Markham, and soon after that time he published his most famous work, **The Man With the Hoe and Other Poems** (1899). As a boy on his mother's ranch in Lagoon Valley, he was a shepherd when he was about seven. She believed in hard work, not schooling, and he later was a farmer and, in his teens, a cowboy. His poems and prose writings in later years showed more than anything else his passion for the natural setting and for the activities of the daily round in which he lived from 1852 until about 1870.

In his **California the Wonderful** (1914), he wrote brief, vivid recollections of his own early boyhood and the flocks of sheep, the herds of cattle, the rodeos which he loved, the tules of Suisun Bay and canyons where cattle fled, the wheat fields, and the vines and fruits around Lagoon Valley and Vacaville. In his poems, he frequently recalled his life "On the Suisun Hills," as he called the region where he lived. His poem, "The Heart's Return," related:

> I cannot ever be so sad
> But one thing still will make me glad—
> That hid spring in the Suisun hills:
> My heart keeps going back to it
> thru all the earthly ills.

Another poem recalled his early redwood schoolhouse and "The Enchanter," Harry G. Hill, a teacher who taught him to love great poetry as Hill himself loved it:

Edwin "Charley" Markham at sixteen

I see the school with its one stark room,
Scribbled with weather-stains,
Where a captive bee with a ceaseless
boom
Pounded the window panes.

From that small school, Charley Markham went on to study briefly at California College. After 1870, he left Lagoon Valley for a fabulous career in the outside world.

Although school attendance was always a problem for many in that day, the community was serious in the belief that the quality of future life was heavily determined by participation in free public education. Being committed to that view, James W. Anderson continued in the educational field as head of the Disciple of Christ Church's Hesperian College in Woodland from 1862 to 1863. In 1875 he served as the ninth and last president of the California Educational Society, which was the parent organization of the California Teachers Association. Ultimately, he was the superintendent of schools for San Francisco from 1887–1890, and superintendent of public instruction for the state of California from 1891–1894. He was the first of a series of pioneers of California education who initiated their careers in Vacaville.

Anderson, who died in San Francisco in 1920, had come to Vacaville from that city to found and act as the proprietor of a private school called the Ulatus Academy, which he opened in 1855. In the **Solano County Herald** in 1856 (November 29), he wrote to the editor in terms characteristic of the hopes and aspirations of the early pioneers in all walks of life:

> In Vaca Valley our schools are in constant session, and the intellectual progress of the pupils has been such as to warrant the hope that in matters educational, her citizens are determined that she shall hold the same rank as she does in fertile soil and the picturesque beauty of her natural scenery. . . .
>
> The school formerly taught by myself has been lately divided; a commodius building has been put up in Vacaville, and in it a private school . . . with a literary society (denominated the "Ulatus Literary Society") has been formed, and initiatory steps taken to procure a library for the same.

Starting with a small frame building, the academy built a six-thousand-dollar, two-story brick building fifty by eighty feet in size and separate boarding houses for boys and girls in 1858. The school was closed in 1858 but the building remained.

The Pacific Methodist College

In 1860 the presence of the academy buildings and furnishings drew the favorable attention of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. They had determined at a San Francisco meeting of the Pacific Conference in 1852 that a West Coast college was needed, and in 1859 they finally decided to found one. Although Cacheville in Yolo County offered the largest pledge of support, the southern Methodists got the buildings and furnishings of Ulatus Academy for less than ten thousand dollars. They opened the Pacific Methodist College in Vacaville in 1861, with Reverend William T. Lucky (often spelled Luckey) as the first president. Until his arrival, Rev. J. C. Stewart was in charge of fund raising and the general operation at Vacaville. The first board of trustees included seven Methodist preachers—Oscar Penn Fitzgerald, Morris Evans, W. T. Lucky, W. R. Gober, J. C. Simmons, P. O. Shattuck, and A. M. Bailey—and seventeen other pioneers of Methodism in California.

A leader in California education and a lifelong friend of Pacific Methodist College, O. P. Fitzgerald, from Virginia, gave an address that dedicated the college to Methodism, but he emphasized that it would be "liberal, tolerant, openhearted" and would be "Christianity, as held and taught by the Methodist Church, South . . . ." Upon application by Fitzgerald, a charter was granted to the college by the state legislature in 1862. Rev. Lucky served as president from 1861 to 1867, and he was succeeded by Rev. W. R. Gober from 1866 to 1867 and by Rev. J. R. Thomas from Emory College, Oxford, Georgia, from 1867 to 1871 when it moved to Santa Rosa.

In practice, Pacific Methodist College sought the patronage of other religious creeds, and in its decade in Vacaville it enrolled students from Solano and a large number of other counties of the state. This was apparent from the year 1862–63, when there were 165 students enrolled, 106 from Solano County and 59 from Sonoma, Yolo, Sutter, Napa, Sacramento, San Francisco, Colusa, Calaveras, Santa Clara, Nevada, San Joaquin, El Dorado, Shasta, Mariposa,

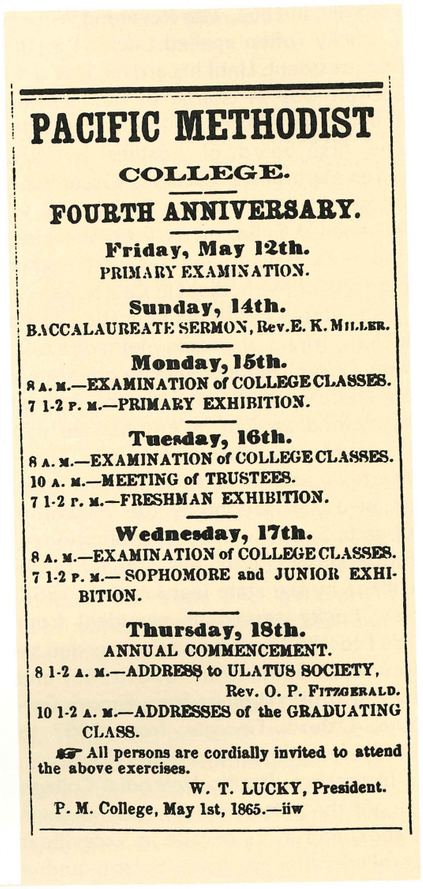
Above: Oscar Penn Fitzgerald, a founder and supporter of Pacific Methodist College. Below: William T. Lucky, president of the college (1861–1867).

Merced, and Placer counties. The first graduate was Charles Allison from San Francisco, who got his bachelor's degree in 1863 at a graduation attended by 250 people, and, from that year until 1871, the college graduated thirty-two students at Vacaville, including five women: E. Melissa Allison, H.J. Allison, Laura E. Lucky, and H.M. Williams in 1865, and Mary C. Lucky in 1867.

The rise of the town of Vacaville in the 1860s and the desire of its leading citizens to attract and to support a good college with their money and with the enrollment of their young people was most positive. They raised funds, attended ceremonies and all kinds of religious services and lectures on temperance and moral issues, and when the college was in financial troubles they banded together to pledge additional funds for building; rebuilding structures destroyed by fire; and furnishing teaching equipment, books, and furnishings. By the time President Lucky resigned in 1867 and went on to be principal of the first state normal school at San Francisco the following year, the **Weekly Solano Herald** (January 18, 1867) could announce with pride that:

> Under his management the institution has grown from a mere local academy to a college of high standing, with students from every part of the Pacific Coast—much of its present prosperity and influence being due to his ability, energy and zeal, and his acknowledged worth as a man.

They were right in their estimate of Lucky, who later served as the head of the California State Normal School



PACIFIC METHODIST

COLLEGE.

FOURTH ANNIVERSARY.

Friday, May 12th.
PRIMARY EXAMINATION.

Sunday, 14th.
BACCALAUREATE SERMON, Rev. E. K. MILLER.

Monday, 15th.
8 A. M.—EXAMINATION of COLLEGE CLASSES.
7 1-2 P. M.—PRIMARY EXHIBITION.

Tuesday, 16th.
8 A. M.—EXAMINATION of COLLEGE CLASSES.
10 A. M.—MEETING of TRUSTEES.
7 1-2 P. M.—FRESHMAN EXHIBITION.

Wednesday, 17th.
8 A. M.—EXAMINATION of COLLEGE CLASSES.
7 1-2 P. M.— SOPHOMORE and JUNIOR EXHIBITION.

Thursday, 18th.
ANNUAL COMMENCEMENT.
8 1-2 A. M.—ADDRESS to ULATUS SOCIETY, Rev. O. P. FITZGERALD.
10 1-2 A. M.—ADDRESSES of the GRADUATING CLASS.

☞ All persons are cordially invited to attend the above exercises.

W. T. LUCKY, President.

P. M. College, May 1st, 1865.—iiw

founded in 1870 by the state legislature and inaugurated in 1871. The cornerstone was laid in 1870 and O.P. Fitzgerald, by that time serving as the fifth state Superintendent of Public Instruction (1867–1871), delivered the address at the ceremony founding what was later

San Jose State College. Both of these pioneers of early California education had also pioneered in higher education initially in Vacaville like James W. Anderson.

All that represented the sweet part of the bittersweet experience of the Pacific Methodist College. It was a positive and productive development that reflected the same spirit of growth in Vacaville and the township in that era. The bitterness of the experience arose from national conflict as expressed in political passion over the Civil War in Solano County.

Civil War Kills the College

The heart of the problem for the college was the presence of passionate advocates of the Confederacy in Vacaville and its township. They were not large in numbers, but they were vocal and influential. As the war continued, pressures built for Solano citizens to support the end of the conflict and end secessionist sentiments. The **Solano County Herald** of August 15, 1863, highlighted the feelings about some elements in Vacaville:

> LOOK OUT—The copperhead canvassers profess to be good, gooder, goodest Union men, in places where the Union element is three or four to one copperhead; but just hear them talk when they get to such places as Vacaville, where the Seceshes are nearly equal to the loyal voters!

The further problem was that the college was increasingly under attack because it was a center of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, and many in that church could not, or would not, break with their basic cultural background. Leaders of the college were attacked in the press as representative of the "secesh church," not necessarily for criticizing Lincoln and the war effort (they did not do that), but for **not** supporting the Union.

Others in the church, like O.P. Fitzgerald, were openly pro-South, and they were resented, before, during, and after the war. As late as April 17, 1869, the **Weekly Solano Herald** editorialized about a complaint by Fitzgerald that the "American Ecclesiastical and Educational Almanac for 1869" totally ignored the "M.E. Church, South, though it is positively the next largest denomination in the United States." The **Herald's** retort was:

> The reason is plain: The belief of the "M.E. Church, South" is not to be considered a **religion**—it was and is and will be a demonology; that is to say, it positively IS the next largest "branch of the great devil's church."

The passionate antagonism clearly extended into postwar reconstruction, and the Southern Methodists were not to be readmitted to God's company.

A final problem existed that is common in human affairs, guilt by association. In the wartime election of 1864, the **Semi-Weekly Solano Herald** (September 3) sneered:

> DEMOCRATS don't "mix politics with religion"—oh, no! Last Sunday, at the close of the service held by the Pacific Methodist Church, (South) at Rockville, a large number of Beriah's **Campaign Press** were distributed among the faithful.

Beriah Brown was a copperhead editor of the **Democratic Press** in San Francisco, and he and other Democrats were under attack for their criticism of President Lincoln and the course of the war. Brown passed out leaflets at the church service; therefore the church—and its college—were disloyal.

These emotions and political antagonisms led to a painful, crippling tragedy for Pacific Methodist College in the last two years of the war. On May 24, 1864, the **Semi-Weekly Solano Herald** at Suisun City published the following account:

> FLAG RAISING— It is reported that as a Company of U.S. Cavalry was passing Vacaville one day last week, the lady of the President of the Pacific Methodist College displayed the Stars and Stripes from a window of the college building, which act the soldiers acknowledged by a salute and cheers, greatly to the disgust of the copperhead students in that institution. To appease their wrath, it is said that the President **apologized** for the indiscretion of his wife; but, not satisfied with that, the students aforesaid procured material for a Confederate rag, with the intention of raising it on the college.—But this patriotic purpose was thwarted by a significant hint that if they perpetrated the foul deed, the building wouldn't stand twelve hours.

The publicly stated threat is clear, and the animosity of some elements in the county and in the town itself is obvious from the language used.

However, on May 25, the paper published a correction from information furnished by President Lucky about his wife and son. It seems a few soldiers had lagged behind their column and—

> were in front of his residence, [when] his youngest son, a little boy of five years of age, who was in the yard, came to the window where his mother was sitting and asked for his flag—a toy consisting only of strips of ribbons sewed together, **not** in imitation of any known flag—and she passed it to him through the open window, and the three or four soldiers cheered. Instead of any excitement on the subject, there was so little that a knowledge of the circumstances did not reach him until the next day, although he was in the adjoining building, and himself called the attention of some of his pupils to the soldiers as they passed. No materials for a confederate flag were purchased or thought of, and no excitement has existed on the subject; and the report has been gotten up and circulated chiefly by those who denounced the Doctor as an abolitionist, with a view to impairing the standing and reputation of the College and its President.

Even with the "correction," the threat that the building might be brought down was let stand, along with the general animosity over issues of the war.

When Abraham Lincoln was shot the community's grief turned to anger focused on those who had not supported him in life. The **Weekly Solano Herald** on April 21 set all its columns in black borders and expressed hatred for copperheads, secessionists, and "bolters." Then, tragedy struck the college, as reported on May 5:

> INCENDIARISM.—At about 3 o'clock last Friday morning [April 28], a fire was discovered in the roof of the wooden portion of the College at Vacaville, which entirely destroyed that building and greatly endangered the boarding-house near by. By dint of great exertion, however, and the application of wet blankets,

> that portion of the property belonging to the College was saved. As there had been no fire in the building for two weeks past, and as no part of it was occupied at night, the conclusion is irresistible that the fire was the work of some dastardly wretch who sought thus to vent his spite against those having charge of the institution, whether prompted by personal feeling or partisan animosity; though we are slow to believe that anyone who has shared the grief which has so recently overwhelmed the nation, caused by democratic lawlessness, would resort to kindred measures to express his disapproval of the stand taken by the President and Faculty of the College.

Rev. J.C. Simmons in **The History of Southern Methodism on the Pacific Coast** stated the position of the church that,

> not knowing who did it, nor the motives that prompted the act, we could never say **why** it was done. But friends and foes seemed to understand that it was done because it was the property of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South.

Whoever had started the fire, for whatever reason, it was a debilitating blow to church funds, which were already in trouble because people had not paid their pledges. Mason Wilson, Josiah Allison, and W.J. Dobbins led the community in raising an initial sum of $2,117.50 the same evening of the fire, and by June the fund was up to $5,000, mostly in Solano County. But the loss was $10,000, and when a three-story brick building was completed in 1866, deep financial harm had been done.

By 1870 inquiries had been made about another town in which to locate the college, and Santa Rosa had offered to pledge $15,000 toward an endowment and to give ten acres of land and buildings worth $25,000 more. The college buildings were sold to Henry E. McCune and J.C. Merryfield of Silveyville and Isaac Brinkerhoff of Batavia, for $4,000, and they intended to present it to the Baptist Church for a college of their own. The Civil War period was too much for the Southern Methodists, so wishing the Baptists well, they took their school to Santa Rosa in the fall of 1871 where it remained until it was closed 1903.

California College

The Baptist Church of California held various meetings in the 1860s to consider supporting a college, and by about 1865 they had under their auspices the Petaluma College School with Rev. Mark Bailey as principal. By 1871 that school was transferred to Vacaville to occupy the buildings and grounds of the Pacific Methodist College.

The **Weekly Solano Republican** of December 8, 1870, reported that the statewide "Baptist Convention" that assembled at Vacaville on December 1 had decided to locate a Baptist college there for all the state. Delegations from eighteen towns and townships arrived, and A.M. Stevenson offered them a $1,000 pledge from Vacaville citizens. The convention set up a seventeen-man board of trustees and instructed them to incorporate the college, select its name, and thank the people of Vacaville for their aid. Henry E. McCune, J.C. Merry-

This buiding served the Pacific Methodist College, the California College, and the California Normal and Scientific School.

field, and Isaac Brinkerhoff were all members of the board, along with men from Suisun, Davisville, Napa, Sacramento, San Francisco, Stockton, Santa Clara, and Grafton. Rev. C.A. Buckbee of San Francisco was president of the trustees, who elected Rev. Mark Bailey to be president of the new college they proposed to open on January 4, 1871, under the name California College.

Articles of incorporation were filed in Sacramento on September 21, 1871, and the college started out with a teaching staff of five persons. The college was openly and positively religious but not sectarian, because it admitted students of all faiths, or of none, to five courses of study—academic, or preparatory; classical; literary; music; and theological. But by 1875 reports began that the trustees were considering a location with more money and more healthful surroundings, and San Jose and Alameda were mentioned as possible future sites. Critics felt that there was not sufficient endowment, that the institution was mismanaged, and that a larger center of "enterprise and intelligence" would be necessary. The numbers of students at the college level remained small, and Vacaville was not more than a small town in that decade. Could it support a college?

In 1880 the **Weekly Solano Republican** reported first that "Prof. Bristow has resigned his place in The College, there not being students enough to justify the employment of three teachers," and then that two more resignations were submitted. In March 1881 President Uriah Gregory himself resigned and by April California College was closed. The Baptist Church had attempted to maintain a college for about a decade under five preacher presidents—the Reverends Mark Bailey (1871–1873), A.S. Morrell (1873–1875), Thomas W. Greene (1875–1877), S.A. Taft (1877–1878), and Dr. Uriah Gregory (1878–1881).

As was the case with the southern Methodists, Vacaville seemed to be too small to attract and support a thriving enrollment of both local and outside students. As the years went by, most of the institutions that survived were located in far larger population centers, and, unfortunately, the Baptists fared no better in their new location at Oakland from 1887 until the school was closed in 1910. Also, in all fairness, these were denominational colleges for which funding had to come from all sections of Methodist and Baptist congregations in the state. Vacaville was not responsible for the limitations of funding by religious groups. In fact, Vacaville men and women were most generous in devoting time to fund-raising activities; supporting college social life; and supplying furnishings, books, and equipment. They took great pride in their colleges and schools.

An Amusement-Loving People

Years later, Mrs. Luzena Wilson looked

NEW ADVERTISEMENTS.

CHARLES

VIVIAN!

THE MOST SUCCESSFUL

Comic Vocalist!

in America, with his

PARLOR CONCERT TROUPE,

will give entertainments, in conjunction with his latest novelty,

MASTER

BONNIE RUNNELLS!

the great New York sensation, from Niblo's Garden Theater, the

Funniest Dutchman!

on the stage, at

VACAVILLE,

Thursday and Friday evenings, October 8th and 9th, 1874, and at

DIXON,

Saturday and Monday evenings, October 10th and 12th. Also at

Woodland and Knight's Landing

shortly.

—o—

Popular Price of Admission, 50 cts.

—o—

A. F. BAILEY, Business Manager.

CHAS. B. TENNILL, Advance Agent.

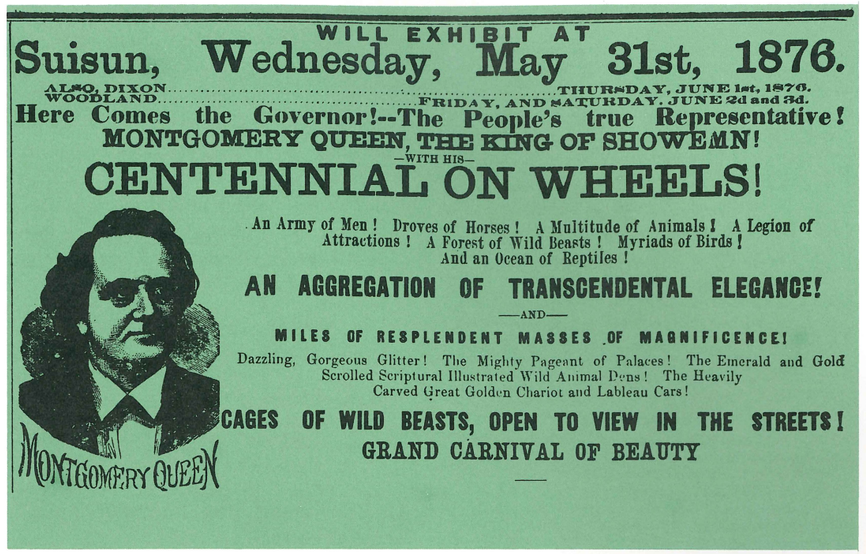
back in nostalgia and observed that:

> We residents of Vaca Valley were an amusement-loving people in the early days of the settlement, and every few weeks saw a ball or party given, to which came all the younger portion of the surrounding families, and not seldom the town overflowed for the night with the buxom lads and lassies from thirty miles away. The largest room in the town—usually my dining room—was cleared to make room for the dancers, and they danced hard and long until daylight, and often the bright sunlight saw the participants rolling away in spring wagons, or galloping off on horseback to their distant homes.

At the Wilson House hotel, she was a central participant and could comment on this from personal experience.

One form of entertainment that was frequently available in nearby towns was the circus. Over the years, Vacaville was entertained by Rowe & Company's Pioneer Circus, Wilson & Zoyara's Great Circus and Hippotheatron, Montgomery Queen's Gigantic Menagerie, Circus, and Traveling World's Fair, and later his Centennial on Wheels (1876), General Tom Thumb and wife, and W.W. Cole's Circus. The shows were well attended, but unfortunately bands of thieves also came—and carried off cushions, buggy whips, buggy robes, overcoats, and the like.

Musical programs, by both visiting companies and local talent, were held every year. Ossian E. Dodge and W. Hayward performed in Gillespie's store in Vacaville, and Charles Vivian brought his Parlour Concert Troupe to Vacaville, with performers from New York. Local talent was abundant: the Vacaville Brass



Band, the Philomathean Society, the Vacaville Thespian Club, and the Vacaville Arion Club performed often at the college chapel, as did the Arion Glee Club at holidays and special occasions.

Dancing and balls were organized at every opportunity. As early as January 5, 1856, the **Solano County Herald** in Benicia advised its neighbors:

> New Year's Amusement—The ball given at Vacaville was crowded to suffocation. We would advise our friends in that section to build a large hall for that purpose, as no doubt it would pay well.

On holidays dances would be at one or another of the towns, and "invitation committees" would be organized in each town, the people meeting at the appointed time and place. There were May Day picnics and balls, Fourth of July balls, Christmas balls, New Year's Eve dances, Washington's Birthday, Thanksgiving, Solano Union Jockey Club, Odd Fellows (I.O.O.F.) balls, Working Women's balls, Granger's balls, harvest balls, Leap Year balls, and, in 1877, a great Fat Man's Ball at Suisun City on December 22. David Dutton, E.R. Thurber, and Bush Stevenson were in charge of invitations for the fat men of Vacaville and all the towns in Solano County were organized for the event with about fifty couples in attendance. Dances usually included a supper party, and they could last into the early hours of the morning. They were well attended, too. A May Day picnic and dance at Gordon's Valley in 1874 had a crowd of 2,000 people from

NEW ADVERTISEMENTS

Union Hall.

POSITIVELY ONE DAY ONLY!
Friday, Aug. 10th.
TWO PERFORMANCES DAILY:
AFTERNOON at 3, EVENING at 8 o'clock.
Doors open at 2 and 7 o'clock.
SILVESTER BLEEKER, - - - Manager.
The Great Original and Renowned
GEN. TOM THUMB & WIFE,
Together with the Infinitesimal
MISS MINNIE WARREN
And the Skatorial Phenomenon & Comic Genius
MAJOR NEWELL, will appear in a variety of New and Fascinating Performances, consisting of Songs, Duets, Dances, Dialogues, Comic acts and Laughable Sketches, Replete with
Sentiment, Fun and Frolic.
To exhibit their great versatility of talent,, they will appear in a new and original Piece, entitled:
The Mischievous Monkey!
Everywhere received with Uproarious and Convulsive Laughter! At each entertainment the Ladies will wear several new and elegant Costumes, magnificent Diamonds, &c.
ADMISSION ONLY 50 CTS.
Children, under 10 years, 25tcs; Reserved Seats, 75 cents; Children under 10 years, to Reserved Seats, 35 cents.
Ladies and Children are considerately advised to attend the Day Exhibition, and thus avoid the crowd and confusion of the Evening performance. GEO. PECK, Agent.

Vacaville and other towns (**Weekly Solano Republican,** May 7, 1874).

Weddings were the occasion for large gatherings and great festivities. At Sunnydale Farm in 1876, Henry A. Bassford and J.M. Bassford, Jr., married Addie V. Laselle and Ida C. Barker in a double wedding ceremony that "caused a double ripple on the sea of matrimony" for that year. The following year, Alice Pleasants was married at the family home. William J. Pleasants hosted 120 friends who came in stylish rigs from Vacaville, Suisun, and Winters, and also in humble wagons from the surrounding neighborhood. There was a new floor, twenty by fifty feet, for dancing to the Rice band from Winters, and the correspondent commented on the

> grandfathers (or those who ought to be grandfathers) whirling in the maizy dance of life (?) [sic] with all the vigor and elasticity of a boy of twenty, would put to the blush some of our young men of these degenerate days.

The young couple left for a honeymoon in Los Angeles after the ceremony, dinner, and dancing.

Other members of the younger generation had gala weddings at the end of the 1870s like George W. Thissell, Jr., William Brinck and Mary Dolan, and Ella Dutton and William T. Stevenson. At the latter event, attended by 500 guests, the young couple was married in the California College chapel, and parties were held afterward in the homes of both the parents, after which the newlyweds took the train to Los Angeles for their honeymoon.

The outdoor sports, mostly for men, continued from the earliest days along about the same lines. Horse-racing contests were held at Vacaville in the early days; there was a Ulatus baseball club in 1873; football became popular in 1874; shooting matches were frequent; and pigeon shooting contests, camping trips

The Roy Coleman family of Pleasants Valley enjoys a horse and buggy ride.

in the north country, and hunting trips were common, with the same results that hunting trips have in all places at all times. The **Weekly Solano Republican** of June 8, 1876, announced:

> The Stevenson boys, together with companions, arrived yesterday from their extended hunt through Lake County, after an absence of seven or eight days, succeeded in bagging one small deer, killing one horse, and poisoning George Stevenson with poison oak. They are satisfied.

Churches and Fraternal Associations

The community took its religious activities to heart too, and the town had four main churches for its citizens and for township churchgoers. Also, it has to be remembered that churches were founded in the years when new townships were being created and people tended to take their churches with them when towns and groups moved to nearby towns and townships. In Vacaville the four denominations that maintained constant church organizations and church structures were the Methodist Episcopal Church, Sôuth, the Disciples of Christ, or Christian Church, the Baptist Church, and the Presbyterian Church.

The Southern Methodists had a Vaca-

ville circuit in the 1850s, they bought the Grace Church at Suisun in 1861 and used it until 1867, and they began the Pacific Methodist College with a chapel and religious services in 1861. They used the college chapel until 1871, when Rev. J.P. Jones built their Vacaville church.

The Christian Church was organized with eleven members in 1855. Their first place of worship was near Vacaville on the ranch of Arculus C. Hawkins. Later the group moved into Vacaville at the expense of Hawkins to a site in downtown Vacaville where it was permanently located.

The Baptist Church of Vacaville was organized in the chapel of California College when the Baptists took over the college in 1871. In its first ten years, the president of the college was often the preacher for the church when resident clergymen were not available. An earlier group of Baptists had organized a Baptist Church in Vaca Valley in 1850. It used the Ulatus Academy building in 1860–1861, then moved to Batavia, then Silveyville, and finally settled at Dixon in 1876. Among the sixteen men and women who formed the church were Henry E. McCune and his wife. Mr. McCune was one of three men who helped buy the Pacific Methodist College in 1870 to turn the buildings over to the Baptist California College in 1871.

The Presbyterian Church organized soon after the Baptists in 1873. It grew slowly until its preacher and an elder resigned. At that point, James C. Weir, a charter member and elder was able to give good leadership to the group. Other trustees in the late 1870s were David Dutton, J.B. Merchant, and J.R. Tilson, along with Mr. Weir.

In addition to these four main congregations, which observers felt were more than ample for a town the size of Vacaville, there were other religious groups that showed an interest in Vacaville. In 1877, Elder B.A. Stevens of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church began to preach and to build a church group there of fifty to sixty members. In 1880 Rev. E.C. Cowan of the Episcopal church at Suisun held services in the Vacaville Methodist Church with such success that he continued to offer Episcopalian services there, in addition to his work in Suisun City, Cordelia, and the county hospital.

The churches were extremely important to the community in every sense. They were pillars of support at all the crucial times of life—birth, marriage, and death. Their members were involved in every political, economic, and social action of the people, and their precepts gave form and direction to local action and behavior.

Vacaville also had many fraternal organizations, which held frequent lodge meetings, social gatherings, excursions to lodges in other towns, attendance at regional and state-level conventions, and funeral services for members. The Independent Order of Odd Fellows (I.O.O.F.) had Lodge No. 83, and the Free and Accepted Masons (F.&A.M.) who were organized in 1858, were very active through Lodge No. 134 during the entire period. These were lodges with fifty or more members, including the leading men of the area. By 1878–1879, Vacaville also had a lodge of the Ancient Order of United Workmen (A.O.U.W.), under the leadership of Henry Eversoll. A fourth fraternal group that began at the same time as the Odd Fellows and Masons was the Good Templars.

Temperance was one of the social and moral issues raised in the township and town, and it involved persons closely related to religion and church work. The question of temperance, or intemperance, in alcoholic consumption had spread early to California, and the Democratic party in 1855 added a political resolution to their plank to support "sober men, and sober men only." In that campaign year the American party (Know-Nothings) wanted "none for office but men of high moral character and known habits of temperance." Of course, the temperance movement concerned men **and women** during the early years in Vacaville; and while women did not win offices in the government, they certainly showed enthusiasm for battling the hardship they saw in society as a consequence of "demon rum."

A poem by "E.M." written at Lagoon Valley on December 17, 1862, was an early statement on the issue (**Solano County Herald,** December 27, 1862). It seems highly likely that this was written by Elizabeth Markham, who was known as a fanatically religious woman and a writer of verse that had given her status as an early literary figure in Oregon before she came to Lagoon Valley in 1856. She was the mother of ten-year-old Charles Edwin Markham. In the poem lie the main concerns of the temperance crusaders, particularly the concerns of the "Dash-away Army," meaning women (the Dash-away was a washing machine of that time):

Elizabeth Markham, Charley's stern mother

King Alcohol

I rove through the city, and prowl
on the plain,
Boasting the innocent victims I've slain;
Of my widows and orphans—the tears
they have shed;
Of desolate hovels, and hearts
that have bled;
Of minds once enlightened, in the
ranks of the brave—
Of the fate of the monarch—of the death
of the slave.
When I ride on the ocean, or sail
on the lake,
I mark down the millions that
follow my wake.
To the mother that weeps o'er
the ruin of her son,
I boast of the chivalrous deeds I have done.
Though oceans of blood and tears
I have spilt,
And have caused cruelty, sorrow, and guilt,
At a breath, or a touch of my magical wand,
The mighty yield liege, their wealth
I command.
The homes of the happy are wrecked
at my nod—
They sacrifice all—even faith in their God.
The brow of the beautiful, lovely and gay,
I have mantled with shame, and stamped
with dismay.
The maid on her lover looks down
with disdain,
For the tie that had bound them I have
severed in twain.
The pride of man's heart—
her music and song
Is turned into wailing as I enter the throng;
And the voice of his children, as they sport
in the dale,
At the sound of the revel is swept
from the vale.
But I feel that my influence begins
to decay,
Since the Dashaway Army disputed
my sway;
My ranks are all breaking; my chief men
have fled—
Taking refuge in signing the
Temperance Pledge.

Lagoon, December 17, 1862. E.M.

By early 1863, Rev. W.T. Lucky of Vacaville was on the temperance circuit in Solano County, where lodges of the Independent Order of Good Templars (I.O.G.T.) were very active. He was invited to speak in Fairfield and Suisun on March 28 and 29, and the **Solano County Herald** urged people to attend:

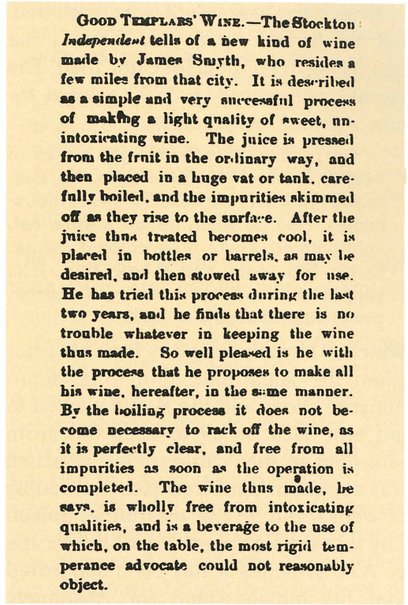
> The curiosity, which the people naturally feel, to see and hear the man whose scholarship and administrative abilities have rapidly raised the Pacific Methodist College of Vacaville to its present high position, will also have its effect in enlarging the audience. (March 21, 1863)

He addressed "respectable audiences," and he was received as an excellent orator:

> Dr. L. was very successful in delivering his sermon on the "good" so earnestly sought after by the human race; and if he was less sucessful in carrying the audience along with him in demonstrating the proposition that a man "Has no right to drink," it was because man is easier led to assent to general truths than to the necessity for specific points of reformation. (April 4, 1863)

The Good Templars never solved the latter problem in the years down to 1880, but they tried.

In 1863 there were reportedly eleven Good Templar lodges in Solano County, three of them in Vacaville township—Science Hill No. 68 at Vacaville, Alamo



GOOD TEMPLARS' WINE.—The Stockton *Independent* tells of a new kind of wine made by James Smyth, who resides a few miles from that city. It is described as a simple and very successful process of making a light quality of sweet, unintoxicating wine. The juice is pressed from the fruit in the ordinary way, and then placed in a huge vat or tank, carefully boiled, and the impurities skimmed off as they rise to the surface. After the juice thus treated becomes cool, it is placed in bottles or barrels, as may be desired, and then stowed away for use. He has tried this process during the last two years, and he finds that there is no trouble whatever in keeping the wine thus made. So well pleased is he with the process that he proposes to make all his wine, hereafter, in the same manner. By the boiling process it does not become necessary to rack off the wine, as it is perfectly clear, and free from all impurities as soon as the operation is completed. The wine thus made, he says, is wholly free from intoxicating qualities, and is a beverage to the use of which, on the table, the most rigid temperance advocate could not reasonably object.

Wine was better than no liquor at all.

No. 78 near the town, and Pleasants Valley No. 101. Science Hill had twenty members, Alamo had eighteen, and Pleasants Valley had eleven. When Rev. James A. Davidson, a well-known temperance lecturer, visited Vacaville in 1864, he reported in the Templars journal, **Rescue**, that "one of the finest audiences I ever addressed in California was convened in the [Pacific Methodist] College Hall." (**Semi-Weekly Solano Herald,** April 9, 1864.)

By 1865 all three lodges had lost ground, and only Pleasant Hill remained active, even though its adherents were unable to convert their groups into large, politically effective bodies. In the state election of 1875, the Temperance Reform Party ran as one of four parties, but no listing of the party appeared in the voting results published by the county where, as usual, Vacaville voted Democratic while the county went to the Republicans. In 1877 a new effort at temperance was sought by the activities in College Hall of another Good Templar's Lodge—Ulatus Lodge No. 191 with seventy charter members under Richardson Long. This new effort continued into the 1880s trying to eliminate the victims described in the poem "King Alcohol."

Sundays and weekdays remained lively with the singing and brawling of male imbibers with their horse races or other rowdy entertainment. Many felt this was simply typical of most of the country towns throughout California. That particular element could shrug off the annoyance caused by the reformers, and indulge in a "humorous" approach to the question, as shown in the **Weekly Solano Republican** (Februry 6, 1879), in a parody of the popular song, "My Grand Father's Clock":

My Grandfather's Pledge

Our grandfather's nose
Was a charming old snout,
And its color a fine reddish glow,
But the whiskey he drank,
Morn'n I can compute,
Kept the old fellow's pocket book low.
"My dear children," he said,
As he called us to him,
"No more shall I ever imbibe;
I'll stop! short!
Never to drink again,"
But the old man died.

The temperance movement did not die, but it did have to await a more receptive time to bring about its "good."

Public Order and Crime

Attempted suicide, insanity, violent acts, and the abandonment of homes and families were all attributed to alcoholic excess over these years. However, alcohol was not the only motive for crime and public disorder in Vacaville. From 1851 to 1880, the press included twenty-five to thirty stories on murders, shootings, horse and cattle theft, saloon brawling, abduction, confidence men, battery, and one near lynching. The rawness of a frontier area was reflected in these crimes, which took place almost every year in that time period.

Land titles in Vaca and Lagoon valleys were a real problem before the issuance of the federal patent to the Vaca-Peña grant in 1858. In one case in September 1857, several men entered the house of R.H. Vance and attempted to murder him, but he escaped. The **Solano County Herald** of September 19, explained that:

> The cause of these murderous assaults appears to have been that Mr. Vance bought a tract of land upon which the assaulting party were or are settlers, and failing to oust him by law, they perhaps thought that by killing him the title would be definitively settled in themselves... Mr. Vance had a very fortunate escape with his life.

Of the several men tried, at least one was found guilty and sentenced either to pay a fine of $300 or spend four months in jail.

One other defendant was acquitted, but he turned up a year later in the county jail in Fairfield for cattle theft. The **Herald** announced a $200 reward for him, Amos A. Winchell:

> He is about five feet eight inches in height, brown hair; hazel eyes, his eyebrows grow over his nose. He wears moustaches. Had on when he left a white hat, light-colored coat, dove-colored pantaloons, (no vest), and a blue shirt. It is supposed that he rode a bay Canadian pony, without saddle or bridle.

Winchell had slipped away from his jailor when the jailor took him to a Negro minstrel show, and the sheriff wanted to get him back in jail to keep him from returning to the "cattle trade." Winchell was caught in San Francisco in a couple of weeks, but, in the meantime, Suisun City jokesters quipped: "Since the escape of A.A. Winchell it has been suggested that his initials stand for Absolutely Absent."

The competition with and disdain for Mexicans in the early years occurred in Vacaville as well as in all of California. In 1857 an unnamed "Spaniard" from Vaca Valley was very nearly lynched when he was chased to the Potrero Hills for allegedly stealing a horse from the Wolfskills. The **Herald** reported October 31:

> They took him to a tree and run him up by the neck, and would probably have let him remain there until dead, had it not been that one of them ascertained that they were practicing on the wrong person.

The "they" who did this were not named, naturally. A fight in a saloon owned by Loring and Bellows was reported in the same insensitive tone:

> Another row took place in the same saloon today between a couple of drunken greasers, one of who was badly injured by being struck over the **cabesa** with a chair in the hands of the other. His scalp was pealed off behind like the skin of a new potato, and blood flowed in copious effusion. They soon after skedaddled for parts unknown, and all is now quiet on the Ulatus.

The Mexican ranchero and vaquero who rode free and proud had obviously entered a new and degrading phase.

In 1866 a man named John Kagee from near Suisun City stole a horse from a widow near Vacaville and ran off with her seventeen-year-old daughter. They sold the horse in Sacramento and then traveled to San Francisco and San Jose, where they were apprehended. The girl was returned to her mother, and Kagee was dismissed on charges of abduction. For the crime of horse theft, however, he was accused of grand larceny, held on $1,500 bail, and tried. Horse theft was considered very serious in those days.

J.L. Smith, "a confidence man," paid the Methodist college a visit in January 1869. Pleading for a loan to get to Sacramento to see his sick wife, he managed to get ten dollars from one preacher before he went on to Stockton and San Francisco where he got more money from the Reverend Burris and the Reverend O.P. Fitzgerald. The **Weekly Solano Herald** (January 30) remarked with commendable sympathy that: "Fleecing Methodist preachers we regard as but a step removed from cheating a printer."

Two major murders occurred in these years, the earliest of which was the killing of Joseph W. Hewitt of Pleasants Valley on March 3, 1871, by Pancha and Guadalupe Valencia. Seeking a place to stay that evening, they shot and killed Hewitt in his front yard as he pointed out the way to a neighbor's barn where they might sleep. The two claimed they did not know English, so Platón Vallejo acted as court interpreter during the trial. They were found guilty of murder in the first degree and were housed in the Fairfield county jail pending execution. Guadalupe was discharged before execution day on November 24, but Pancha was hanged, the second man to be legally executed in Solano County history.

$500.00 REWARD!

A REWARD OF FIVE HUNDRED DOLlars will be paid for the arrest and convicton of the murderer of Christian Weihmiller, who, it is supposed, was murdered on the 8th of March, 1878, in the county of Solano.

Witness my hand this the 28th day of March,

A. D. 1878, WILLIAM IRWIN Governor.
ap4

$275 REWARD!

WE, THE UNDERSIGNED, CITIZENS OF Vacaville and vicinity, agree to give the sums set opposite our names respectively for the arrest and conviction of the murderer of Christian Weihmiller:

NAMES.	AMOUNT.
M. Blum	$50 00
James McMurtry	50 00
W. P. Dobbins	50 00
J. W. Burnham	50 00
T. McGregory	25 00
Antonio Esquival	50 00

Vacaville, March 21, 1878.—mh28-4w

Seven years later, on March 10, 1878, the report of another murder shocked the community. Christian Weihmiller, a German grain farmer, was killed in his wine cellar by someone who cut his throat with a case knife and a hatchet. Robbery was supposed to have been the cause of the crime since furnishings were turned over and the house showed evidence of pillage. An inquest was held, and his nearby neighbor, Antonio Esquivel, and five others from Vacaville offered a $275 reward for his killer. Governor William Irwin offered $500 from the state. Several persons were arrested, including two Italians near Vacaville and Ricardo Acosta and his wife, who had worked for the murdered man at one time, but the mystery was never solved.

Crime seldom involved the wealthier leaders of Vacaville, except when their property was stolen or harmed. However, in a very few cases, some well-known people were in the newspapers. In 1878 Dr. W.J. Dobbins attacked music professor Theodore Ryhiner with a heavy cane for scolding his daughter when she called him an "old fool" for not letting her go home early from a music lesson. Dr. Dobbins put three large welts on the head of Ryhiner, and paid a $100 fine for battery. In 1879 Henry B. Ammons was robbed of $800 by a Hank Morton who roomed with him. When confronted with a charge of robbery, Morton took "French leave." Finally, in 1880 Dr. J.M. Hubbard of Lagoon Valley absconded rather than face bills and heavy mortgages on his farm. He abandoned Mrs. Hubbard and left the people of Vacaville to wonder why he had taken so drastic a step, even under those circumstances.

Inevitably, "civilization" caught up with Vacaville; Mrs. Luzena Wilson describes it in the following way:

> The old-time Sabbath amusements of riding bucking mustangs into the saloons, drinking all day at the various bars, running foot-races, playing poker, and finishing the day with a free fight are things of the past. The sobering influence of civilization has removed all such exciting but dangerous pastimes as playing scientific games of billiards by firing at the balls with a pistol, taking off the heads of the decanters behind the counter with a quick shot, and making the bar-keeper shiver for his well-curled hair. Now when the individual members of the enlightened population play cards, as perhaps they sometimes do, it is in the seclusion of the back-room, out of range of prying eyes.

So, the bad habits continued, but at least they were properly hidden.

Violence in Daily Life

If man was unkind to man in those pioneer years, nature and the daily round of activities threatened even greater violence to town and country folks. Fire was probably the single greatest destructive force in that early period, and it has already been seen that it nearly destroyed the town of Vacaville twice in 1877. Fire could be caused by many things, and, once started, fires were a great threat when combined with strong north winds and the general lack of water to fight the flames. Sometimes as many as 200 men banded together to fight field fires.

In town, there were fires from candles igniting canvas walls in early houses, fires left in stoves, boys playing with matches, merchants spilling flammable materials in stores, and even cases like the following reported in the Suisun **Solano Press** (September 26, 1866):

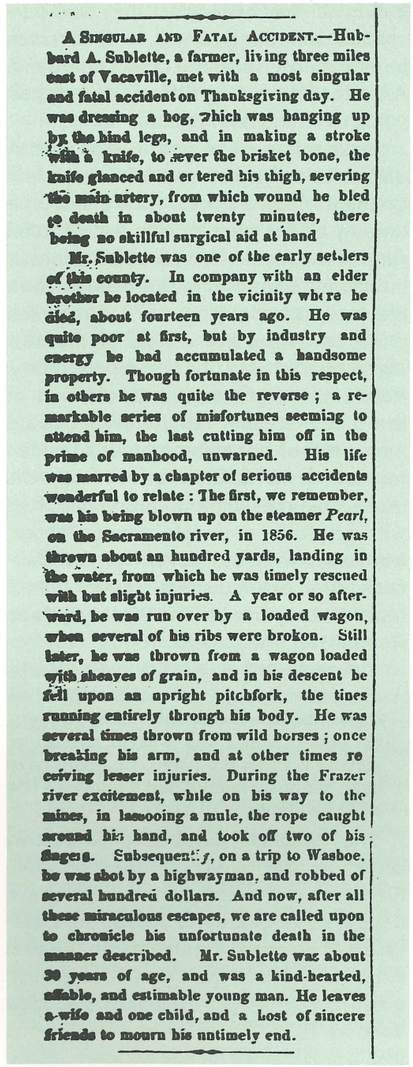
> On Monday, the 10th inst., the dwelling of Wm. Huland, near Vacaville, was burned down. It is supposed that the fire originated from a coal dropped from Mrs. Huland's pipe, among some bed clothes in a bedroom, as the fire commenced there shortly after the old lady was in the room. Mr. Huland (who is 70 years old) hearing the noises of the flames, started for the room and opened the door. The flames having been before closely confined, rushed out and enveloped the gentleman, burning his face, tongue, and throat badly. The fire having made such progress before the discovery, the old people were forced to abandon the house, which burned with all its contents.

In the surrounding plains and valleys, the hay and grain stubble and dry fields of wheat were always vulnerable. Barns were often the places where fires originated, and coals from fires threatened neighbors and their fields. After 1869, locomotives of the Vaca Valley Railroad Company frequently ignited fields along their route. Sometimes unknown persons lit fires for revenge in local disputes. Whatever the cause, fire was a terrible scourge to one and all, and it made no social distinctions when it attacked the community. Not until 1880 was there hope for relief with the introduction of the new Babcock fire extinguisher. In July the ladies of Vacaville started a subscription to raise money to buy several extinguishers; by August they had purchased six extinguishers, and the men had formed a hook and ladder company. After that the extinguishers proved their value over and over again.

Accidents also played a large role in daily life. As in the case of fire, violent accidents took their toll of life and limb among all the people. Gun accidents in rural areas most often caused the loss of limbs and even of life. But even in town life was hazardous; in 1871 a man fell thirty feet from the cupola of the new Methodist church but escaped injury. Ralph, the eighteen-month-old son of the J.B. Merchant family fell backward into a tub of hot water and was scalded to death in 1878. Children fell into wells too, sometimes without injury, but often with painful or even fatal consequences. Ironically, with the advent of the Babcock fire extinguishers came a new hazard as reported in the **Weekly Solano Republican** (August 13, 1880):

> Prof. Theo. Ryhiner had a narrow escape a few evenings ago. He had been operating one of the new Babcock fire extinguishers. He laid it down and was in the act of leaving it when it bursted. He might have been seriously injured had it bursted a few minutes earlier.

The greatest number of accidents came in the area of transportation. Steamers and railroads presented grave dangers. For example, Joseph M. Bassford was on board the steamship "Central America" when it went down in a gale on a trip between San Francisco and New York in 1857. There were 419 persons lost, but Bassford luckily escaped. Jacob Blum, a Vacaville merchant, was on



A SINGULAR AND FATAL ACCIDENT.—Hubbard A. Sublette, a farmer, living three miles east of Vacaville, met with a most singular and fatal accident on Thanksgiving day. He was dressing a hog, which was hanging up by the hind legs, and in making a stroke with a knife, to sever the brisket bone, the knife glanced and entered his thigh, severing the main artery, from which wound he bled to death in about twenty minutes, there being no skillful surgical aid at hand.

Mr. Sublette was one of the early settlers of this county. In company with an elder brother he located in the vicinity where he died, about fourteen years ago. He was quite poor at first, but by industry and energy he had accumulated a handsome property. Though fortunate in this respect, in others he was quite the reverse; a remarkable series of misfortunes seeming to attend him, the last cutting him off in the prime of manhood, unwarned. His life was marred by a chapter of serious accidents wonderful to relate: The first, we remember, was his being blown up on the steamer *Pearl*, on the Sacramento river, in 1856. He was thrown about an hundred yards, landing in the water, from which he was timely rescued with but slight injuries. A year or so afterward, he was run over by a loaded wagon, when several of his ribs were broken. Still later, he was thrown from a wagon loaded with sheaves of grain, and in his descent he fell upon an upright pitchfork, the tines running entirely through his body. He was several times thrown from wild horses; once breaking his arm, and at other times receiving lesser injuries. During the Frazer river excitement, while on his way to the mines, in lassooing a mule, the rope caught around his hand, and took off two of his fingers. Subsequently, on a trip to Washoe, he was shot by a highwayman, and robbed of several hundred dollars. And now, after all these miraculous escapes, we are called upon to chronicle his unfortunate death in the manner described. Mr. Sublette was about 30 years of age, and was a kind-hearted, affable, and estimable young man. He leaves a wife and one child, and a host of sincere friends to mourn his untimely end.

The hazards of pioneer life

board the steamship "Sophia McLane" at the Suisun City wharf when its boiler exploded in 1864. He was badly hurt, but he survived and lived fourteen more years. And in 1877 W. Skelton, a young brakeman on the Vaca Valley Railroad, was killed while hooking on railway cars at the Madison switch.

Horses and wagons, steep grades, and faulty bridges also took heavy tolls of passengers in that equestrian age. For example, Luis Vaca, the seventeen-year-old son of Pomocino Vaca, was thrown from a wagon and tragically killed near Vacaville in 1867. A new wagon owned by M.R. Miller, drawn by six horses and carrying 6,000 pounds of grapes, broke through a bridge on the way to Pleasants Valley in 1868, but fortunately the driver escaped injury. In 1870 Charles H. Stevenson and Jeptha Janes were driving hogs across the bridge over Ulatis Creek when it collapsed, but fortunately they escaped injury.

Runaway horses or runaway wagons were frequently reported. Families out for a social trip, picnickers on weekends, and laborers all ran risks. One of James Gate's young sons of Vaca Valley had a team bolt and run away at Silva hotel, but he managed to jump free before the horses ran into a water trough. L.W. Buck's team ran away in 1880, throwing Emma Buck and Mrs. Bellows out and bruising them considerably. Passengers were really quite lucky if they escaped with their lives, even if injured in the process, in that age of the horse, the steamship, and the "iron horse."

Pioneers in an Age of Progress

In retrospect, the people of the Vacaville area had every reason to view the years from 1851 to about 1880 as an age of great creativity and progress toward their chosen way of life. A person writing from Vacaville township and signing the letter simply "Ulatus," expressed the early prospects for the neighborhood to the editor of the **Solano County Herald** (May 31, 1856) in Benicia. The letter was an invitation to Benicia residents to attend a religious revival in Barker Valley, where they could leave their winter climate and have their souls refreshed at the same time:

> There is no county in this State that can afford more beautiful natural scenery, connected with richness of soil and general natural advantages than Solano. A taste for learning characterizes the people, and as a consequence Green, Suisun and Vaca Vallies [sic] are each supplied with as good schools as any in the state. The people are determined to make this section of the country the "admired of all admirers," both as to natural, artificial and intellectual beauty. Whenever we get the railroad through here, and the people seem sanguine in regard to it, this country will afford advantages to the farmer for carrying his produce to market, which can be enjoyed by no other. Speed that day when the neighing of the iron horse shall resound along the vallies and reverberate through the canons, rousing Solano's citizens to a realizing sense that the present is an age of progress.

That spirit was the starting point for the settlers. They had an abiding love of the land and climate, and they added to that a sense of purpose, optimism, and energy and a determination to grow and progress in spite of any obstacles.

The Oldest Residents

In 1866 the county assessor made note of the fact that Thomas Harvey Morton of Fairfield was eighty-eight years of age, the oldest enrolled voter in Solano County at that time. Furthermore, he had seen General George Washington and had been a soldier in the War of 1812 (**Weekly Solano Herald**, August 3, 1866). Ten years later, the Great Register of California contained the names of five Vacaville men among the oldest voters in the county. Thomas Maupin of Vacaville was seventy-nine, which means his lifetime began before Washington died in 1799. The other men were Green Scoggins (77), Robert Underhill Grey (76), Jefferson Ashbrook Gates (72), and Jeddiah Williams (72). This generation had lived through major national events like the War of 1812, the Texas War, the Mexican War, and the Civil War, and they pioneered the settlement of California within the great westward expansion under "manifest destiny."

For the most part, Vacaville's destiny was cast in an Anglo-Saxon mold in spite of the melting-pot nature of the population. It began as an agrarian society, and it remained essentially agricultural in outlook and activity. The "iron horse" did eventually reach Vacaville in 1869, and this did indeed tie the area into markets that the early pioneers could scarcely have thought possible. The wealth that came with the incredible productivity of the land and people was used to turn canvas and board huts into substantial residences in the three valleys and Vacaville. Good education up through the college level was supported, and a fun-loving and hard-working society thrived on the natural bounty and beauty of their recently acquired land and state.

The iron horse ousted the stagecoach.

Times Have Changed.

Milt. Cutler, one of the old pioneers of Suisun, but latterly of Napa, has been in town during the week, shaking hands with many old friends. He is remembered by all old citizens as one of the most agreeable and accommodating stage managers we ever had. He had at one time three stage lines centering into Suisun—one from Monticello, one from Vacaville, and one from Benicia—and all doing a rushing business. And those were prosperous times, too; before the great octopus laid it rails and absorbed all our young blood and vitality. With Suisun a central shipping point for all the produce for miles and miles around and the town filled to overflowing with wagons, teams, business men, farmers, and lots of business to do, those were lively times indeed. And what has the railroad done to repay us for this loss of trade and pros erity? Ah, but times have changed, and to talk against railroads is to be challenged as an old fogy. But there are many old citizens of Suisun who would like to return to those good old days and have Milt. Cutler reestablish his stage lines with Wm. Quick as chief Jehu. However, we progress—we have in lieu the iron horse and these two Jehus, are prosperous and forehanded farmers.

The Rancho Families

The day of the adobe and roaming cattle gave way to brick and board buildings surrounded by orderly fences; fields; and rows of orchards, vines, and vegetable gardens. The patriarch of the Vaca-Peña Los Putos grant, Juan Manuel Vaca, died in 1858 at the age of seventy-four. He did not live long enough to know of the final settlement of the title to his grant by the United States government later that same year. The Vaca descendants were in the area in 1850, but by 1860 they had moved to the Tremont township to the northeast. Twenty years later, county maps show Vaca lands in Tremont and Silveyville townships, but by 1880 the only remaining Vaca descendant was thirteen-year-old Prudy Vaca, living with her grandmother, Isabella Peña, and aunt Nestora Peña, and going to school in the township.

The Peña family tended to maintain their roots in the original area of settlement near Vacaville and in Lagoon Valley. Juan Felipe Peña, who was about nineteen years younger than Juan Manuel Vaca, died in 1863 (**Solano County Herald**, March 21):

> AN OLD SETTLER GONE. — On Sunday last [March 15], at 8 P.M., Juan Felipe Peña died in Lagoon Valley, aged 73 years. The occurrence is the more notable from the fact of his being an old settler—having come into the county in 1841—and from his connection with Vaca in obtaining and settling upon the widely known Vaca and Peña Grant, which covers so large a portion of the territory in the country. The old gentleman had five sons and two daughters, and is said to have enjoyed perfect health through life until the final summons came. His remains were carried to Benicia on Tuesday (March 17), where they were interred according to the rites of the Holy Catholic Church.

His widow, Isabella Peña, continued to live in the adobe family home in Lagoon Valley until her death in 1885.

The various censuses from 1850 to 1880 show the presence of the Peña family in Vacaville township, where they kept their inheritance of land. José Demetrio Peña had one of the largest grain farms by 1880, and he was listed with the wealthy "nabobs" of the township. He was an important man in the Vacaville region. His sister, Nestora Peña, continued to live at the family adobe, and she kept her land into the present century. They were exceptions to the general practice of the two families which was to sell the land and move on.

The Anglo Pioneers

The term "Anglo" is used rather generally to describe the society of that early period, but many people who participated in important ways, particularly in the laboring and tradesmen levels, were not Anglos at all. The leadership, however, did tend to be Anglo in a broad sense, and they quickly displaced most of the rancheros and later non-Anglos.

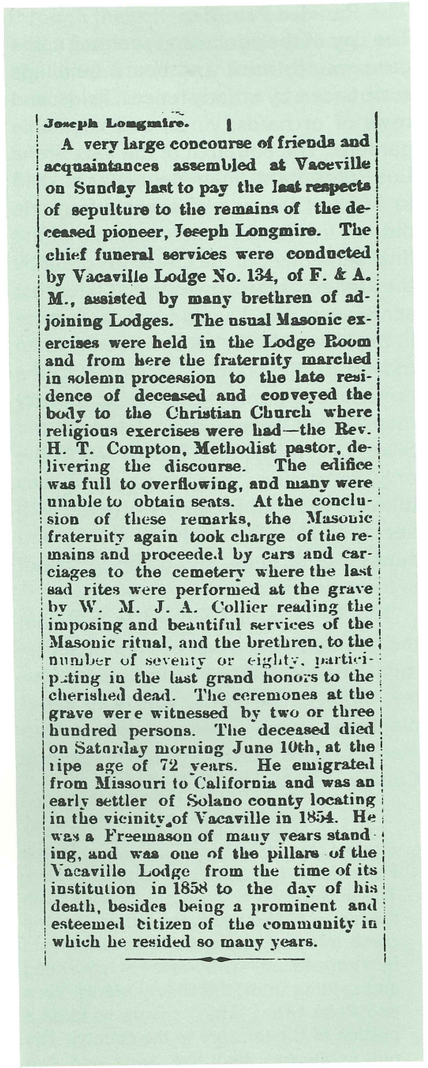
Lansing B. Mizner, the enterprising partner with William McDaniel in founding Vacaville, continued to reside at Benicia. By 1880 he had served as a state senator (1865–1868) and was a frequent spokesman for and before the local pioneer associations. McDaniel, however,

has disappeared in the historical literature of the early days.

Solano County organized its pioneers through the years. In 1869, Vallejo chartered its Vallejo Society of California Pioneers, and forty-niners like Mason Wilson, Josua Donaldson, Richardson Long, and Patrick H. Dunn were elected members. In 1882 at Suisun City J.M. Pleasants, M.R. Miller, Dr. W.J. Dobbins, and J. Wesley Hill helped organize the Association of Solano Pioneers of California.

While these associations were important and were properly appreciated at that time and since, it is more dramatic to take a look at the residents who came with and after the forty-niners and at their relationship to the Vaca-Peña land grant and its ultimate disposition. Pleasants Valley was outside the grant, so it is not included in any consideration relating to the grant. However, historian Wood Young in his **Vaca-Peña Los Putos Rancho and the Peña Adobe** provides two listings—Appendix S and Appendix T—that contain a total of 127 men and companies that purchased land from the Vaca-Peña grant. The names are the same ones that run all through the 1850–1880 time period, and the descendants of those men continued to make history in the Vacaville area after 1880. The land in the Vaca-Peña grant was the basis for the wealth, progress, and achievements of the region beginning in the early 1850s.

The years after 1850 took their toll on many families through accident, infirmity, the breaking up of families, removal



Joseph Longmire.

A very large concourse of friends and acquaintances assembled at Vacaville on Sunday last to pay the last respects of sepulture to the remains of the deceased pioneer, Joseph Longmire. The chief funeral services were conducted by Vacaville Lodge No. 134, of F. & A. M., assisted by many brethren of adjoining Lodges. The usual Masonic exercises were held in the Lodge Room and from here the fraternity marched in solemn procession to the late residence of deceased and conveyed the body to the Christian Church where religious exercises were had—the Rev. H. T. Compton, Methodist pastor, delivering the discourse. The edifice was full to overflowing, and many were unable to obtain seats. At the conclusion of these remarks, the Masonic fraternity again took charge of the remains and proceeded by cars and carriages to the cemetery where the last sad rites were performed at the grave by W. M. J. A. Collier reading the imposing and beautiful services of the Masonic ritual, and the brethren, to the number of seventy or eighty, participating in the last grand honors to the cherished dead. The ceremonies at the grave were witnessed by two or three hundred persons. The deceased died on Saturday morning June 10th, at the ripe age of 72 years. He emigrated from Missouri to California and was an early settler of Solano county locating in the vicinity of Vacaville in 1854. He was a Freemason of many years standing, and was one of the pillars of the Vacaville Lodge from the time of its institution in 1858 to the day of his death, besides being a prominent and esteemed citizen of the community in which he resided so many years.

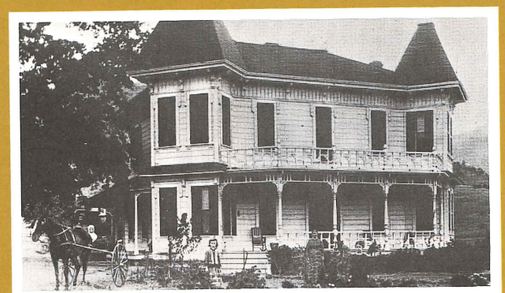
The funeral of a Vacaville pioneer

to other areas, and death. With so many notable names to choose from, only a sampling of cases can be given here. In 1872 Mason Wilson left his family to go to Texas where he farmed until his death there on September 4, 1882. Mrs. Luzena Stanley Wilson left Vacaville in the late 1870s to live in San Francisco, returning from time to time to Vacaville and her family and property there. In 1881 Jesús Peña, while riding horseback to Winters, stopped to get a drink by the roadside and fell dead. He was the brother of José Demetrio and Nestora Peña. Henry B. Ammons, a pioneer, died on a wagon trip in Shasta County in 1882, on his way to the mountains for his health. The circle of founding fathers was narrowing.

One final death to make note of came in 1877, when Mrs. E.L. Bennett died at age forty-eight. The **Weekly Solano Republican** (December 6, 1877) told a story very typical of the pioneer women from Mrs. Luzena Wilson to Mrs. Martha Bennett:

> She and her devoted husband formed the first family that settled on the plains over the hill east of Vacaville in 1852.... At that time these plains were a wild waste, and it was conjectured that it was a foolhardy undertaking to attempt to till them; but she patiently assisted her husband through all the vicissitudes of those pioneer days, until, at the time of her death, the whole section had been made to blossom as a rose, an interesting family had sprung up around her, and the wild lands they had settled upon had grown into a beautiful home of great worth. Mainly to her patience, frugality and excellent domestic qualities is due this wonderful transition.

The story of Martha Bennett was the story of the other pioneer women who shared richly in that early time of progress and development.



PART THREE

The Golden Age, 1880-1918

The forty years after 1880 might well be called Vacaville's "Golden Age." In this period fresh fruit was the prime mover that shaped the growth and development of the community. The profits from early fruit continued to attract hundreds of newcomers to the area, most coming in the booming eighties and many emigrating from older societies in Europe and the East. Some came to farm, others to help harvest, still others to provide goods and services, but all sought a share in the land's treasure. The influx of newcomers not only changed the look of the land but also complicated the social order. Out of the ferment arose new challenges as well as new opportunities, some stemming from the economics of fruit culture and others growing out of the dynamics of a society in transition. Even though the population stabilized after 1890 and the rural character of the community continued to prevail, by World War I Vacaville had passed through its golden age and stood on the threshold of new changes that were both exciting and troubling.

Growth and Development of the Fresh Fruit Industry

Fruit companies hired hundreds of local women during the height of the harvest season. At the Earl Fruit Company's packing house, Mrs. Cordelia Adams demonstrates the art of fancy-packing cherries.

Vacaville's economic transition from grain to fruit began as early as the 1850s but culminated in the 1880s. It was an exciting decade of rapid material growth, widespread prosperity, and unbridled optimism. As a community trade center Vacaville soon outpaced rivals Elmira and Winters, and by the turn of the decade Vaca Valley had already earned national recognition as the heart of one of the most important fresh fruit districts in the country.

The region's impressive growth in the 1880s was part of a statewide boom that brought thousands of immigrants to California. Most were eastern and midwestern farmers attracted by promotional literature from real estate dealers and railroads, which advertised, with considerable exaggeration, the unique climate and soil conditions of the Golden State. Even the experts were incautious, as seen in the report of Joseph Routier, a Sacramento prune grower who painted a rosy picture in the 1883 **Transactions of the California State Agricultural Society.** He assured readers that the average net profits to be expected in seven years from a $1,500 investment in ten acres of unimproved bottomland was $5,000—a 233 percent increase! Even discounted by half, such stories sounded fabulous to midwestern farmers on marginal land, and they flocked west in the eighties looking for the rainbow's end, just as their forefathers had done in the Gold Rush.

Most immigration in the eighties was to southern California, where land speculation went wild, but northern California also benefited, particularly in the agricultural districts where large estates were being broken up. After touring both regions, one disgruntled farmer found the parched flatlands south of the Tehachapis hardly to his liking. "I would much prefer to buy land in the Vaca Valley at $200 per acre," he exclaimed, "or an Illinois farm at double its value," than invest in southern California real estate. In his opinion the southern land was good for only two types of people: the very rich and the speculators. Legitimate farmers —those who wanted to settle rather than turn a quick profit with a quitclaim deed —looked north.

A romantic view of Lagunita Rancho in Lagoon Valley. Planted in the 1880s, these well-groomed orchards earned handsome profits and statewide distinction for their owner, Mrs. E.P. Buckingham.

Packing houses hummed with life during the summer. One of the busiest in Vaca Valley was at Bucktown, where Frank Buck (facing camera in helmet) surveys part of his peach harvest.

The Good Earth

If farmers looked at the Vacaville district they found two important prerequisites: favorable growing conditions and open land awaiting intensive cultivation. As early as the 1850s pioneer farmers discovered that deciduous fruit ripened earlier there than in any other part of the country then under cultivation. The harvest season extended from April to November. Due to differences in air pressure and wind conditions, fruit matured earlier on the gentle slopes of the English Hills and the foothills of the Vaca Mountains than it did in bottomland orchards. Pioneer growers also found sufficient rainfall to produce commercial crops with no irrigation except for the "sweat-drops of energy," as one enthusiast put it. This led to the discovery of another distinctive attribute: nonirrigated fresh fruit was smaller than the watered variety, but it held up longer after picking—a decided advantage because of the long haul to market.

Soil conditions were also favorable to fruit culture in and around Vacaville, particularly in the rich alluvial bottomlands. Hill soils were thinner and less productive, but the earlier harvest there offset the terrain disadvantages, and soil exhaustion and erosion were problems to be faced by future generations; in the late nineteenth century Vacaville farmers, like those elsewhere, mined the soil to achieve maximum production without considering or even realizing possible long-range harmful effects.

The many different soils and the long growing season made a wide variety of crops possible, which contributed to the district's reputation. Peaches and apricots were the most important early crops, but almost every conceivable type of fruit and vegetable was planted in the early days. For a time even tobacco was thought to be suitable for commercial production, and for a short time in 1897 a cigar factory manufactured its products under the "Belle of Vacaville" label. Most local tobacco, however, was too rough to smoke, although it made a creditable sheep dip.

In addition to climate, water, and soil, farmers found other advantages in the Vacaville district. Frosts were rare in the budding season, and the Vaca Mountains protected tender leaves and fruit from harmful fog and wind. Finally, every part of the district was within ten miles of a railroad. Ironically, the growth of fruit culture in Vacaville depended less on Mother Nature than on adequate transportation to markets, which made large-scale commercial fruit production profitable.

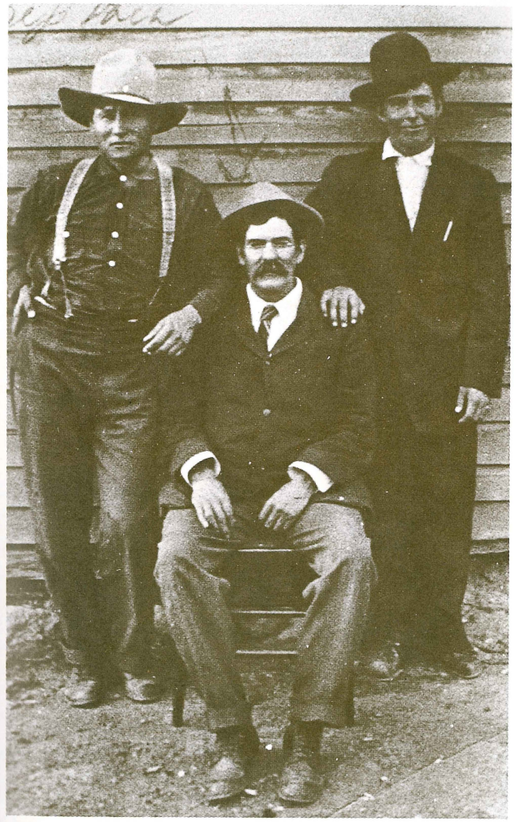
Changing the Face of the Land

The orchard boom, besides attracting prominent families, also transformed the land. In Vaca Valley during the seventies the land was characterized by open fields occasionally interrupted by small orchards, but by the 1890s almost every clearing had been covered with fruit trees standing in arrow-straight rows like soldiers on parade. Trees also extended up the slopes of the foothills on the west and practically covered the English Hills to the northeast. By the nineties over

15,000 acres had been planted: almost all the available nonirrigated land that could be used for horticulture. Thus the Vacaville fruit district had reached its limits before the end of the century.

Transforming the land radically altered its ecology. Bears, mountain lions, and

Florentine Vaca (center), foreman of the Montgomery ranch, with two friends



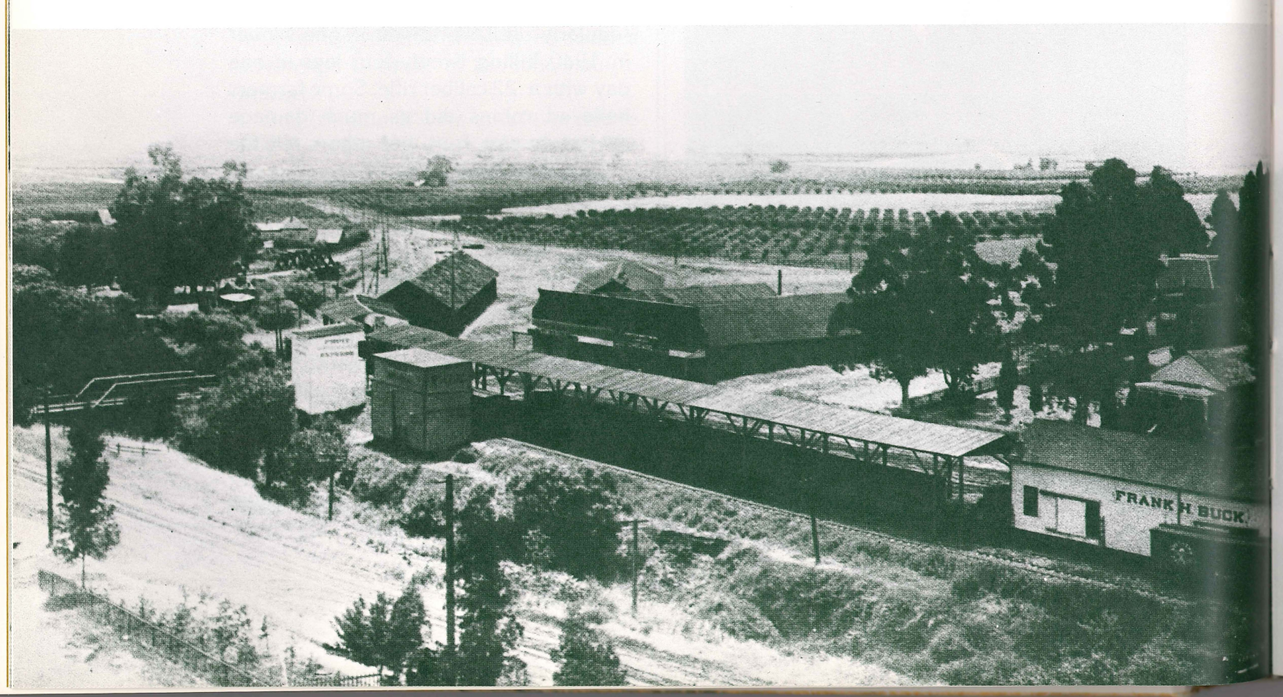
eagles quickly disappeared under the guns of the sheep and cattle ranchers, one man dispatching at least eight eagles in the early months of 1883 and collecting a $2.50 bounty each from the county. Rabbit drives, terminating in a fenced cul-de-sac and a spirited bashing of heads, ended the reign of the hare and made a criminal out of his chief four-legged predator, the coyote, who was forced to take up chasing sheep for a living. However, neither the coyote nor that other chronic pest of the farmer, the ground squirrel, gave up without a fight, despite the persistent extermination efforts of their two-legged enemies.

Other animals were less vulnerable. Orchardists made war on the California jay as fervently as sheepmen attacked the eagle, and the county obligingly provided bounties to add incentive. Sporting clubs held organized "bluejay hunts" regularly until World War II, one winner in 1940 killing twenty-four jays in one day with a .22 caliber rifle. Some farmers believed robins did as much damage as jays to ripe fruit, but others felt the insects they ate were worth the price of a few cherries or plums. Despite the sporadic extermination efforts, both robin and jay, as well as various other field and garden birds, can be found today in the Vacaville habitat.

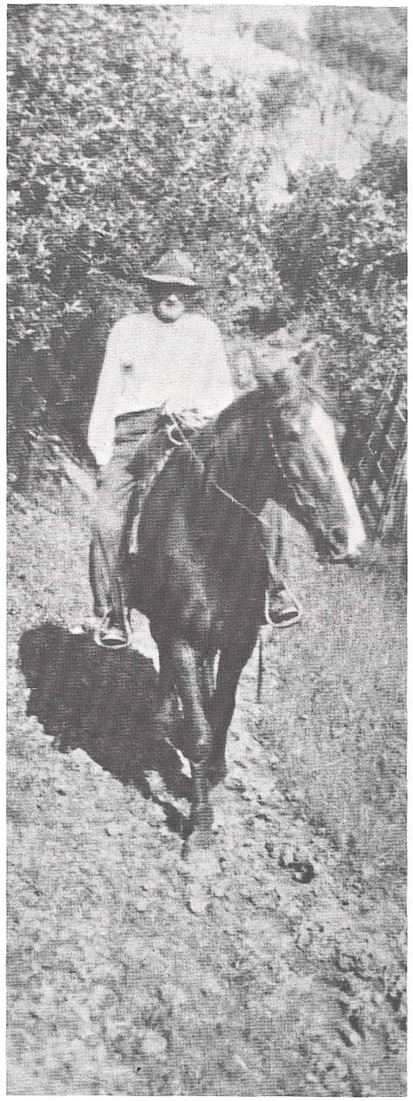
A few trout are still caught in Alamo Creek, although they can hardly match the size or quantity of their ancestors. So abundant were native trout in 1883 that two fishermen caught 210 in one short expedition taken down Pleasants Valley, Stream erosion and pollution, however,

quickly reduced the trout population, and as early as 1890 Vacaville fishermen were forced to head for Clear Lake or the Sierras to find a good trout stream. Today animal life around Vacaville is smaller and less varied than it was in the 1880s, but the battle against unwanted animals goes on.

Native flora also gave way to the farmer and orchardist as the conquest of nature proceeded in Vacaville. Scattered valley oaks and cottonwoods along the streambanks quickly disappeared into the fireplaces and fences of the new settlers, and some of the newcomers temporarily sustained themselves as woodcutters in the nearby hills. At the delivered price of $6 or $7 a cord it was a respectable living but a hard one, and most woodmen found other work as soon as possible.



Above: Postmistress Eliza Stitt (right front) and crew. Below: Fruit sheds lining the rails.



Rudolph Riehl was nine years old when he and his family arrived in Vacaville in April of 1893. Fourteen years later, after alternately going to school and working at odd jobs, he and his brother Ed went into the wood business in Gordon Valley, just across the line in Napa County. On private land they located a grove of choice coast live oak and paid the owner $1.25 for every cord they cut and split entirely by hand. To assist them they hired four woodcutters. "We paid the choppers two dollars a cord," explained Rudolph. "Ed was an expert saw sharpener, and he charged the woodchoppers a little for sharpening their saws. It isn't all in how hard you work, it's how sharp your tools are. When the wood was ready to market, we got seven dollars a cord delivered ten miles over the hills. All our old team could pull was a cord and a half at a time. So you see there wasn't much profit in it. The woodcutters didn't amount to much. Out of the four, we had two pretty fair woodchoppers. The rest of them, all they cared about was making enough money for their winter stake. I didn't blame 'em; it was hard work."

Before the days of natural gas and electricity, the demand for wood was high. In Solano County many farmers turned to the eucalyptus, an Australian import, as an alternative to rapidly diminishing native wood supplies. Impressed by reports from other California counties that gum trees made good fence posts, firewood, and windbreakers, area farmers by the early 1880s were planting trees on the back forty or lining their property boundaries. The eucalyptus did not turn out to be the panacea its advocates had hoped for, but its adaptability to the semiarid climate of upper Solano gave it a niche in the changing local ecology that it still holds.

Ecological change paralleled economic growth as the fruit business advanced. The most rapid growth in Vacaville's "golden age" occurred in the eighties, when "orchard fever" reached its peak. It was a propitious moment for older ranchers, farmers, and landlords, because the wheat and cattle business was not as good as it used to be, and land values were rapidly accelerating. Conversion or sale were therefore the two obvious options. Some older settlers converted to fruit; some sold out to subdividers who broke up large ranches into smaller, more manageable orchard plots; and some converted part of their ranches and sold the remainder. In any case the result was the end of the "rancho" era in Vacaville. After 1890, instead of unbroken estates of thousands of acres, the characteristic individual plot was thirty or forty acres, and the largest individual tracts seldom exceeded 500 acres. The total acreage under single ownership sometimes went much higher, but in most of those cases the landholdings were scattered throughout the area.

Leaders of the Industry

As we have seen in earlier sections, the immigrant farmers of the 1880s had been preceded by dozens of others who pioneered the development of early fresh fruit. Before the 1870s most of these pioneers began as cattle or grain ranchers, gradually converting small sections of their large acreages to fruit or vegetable culture as production and marketing prospects improved. Conversion accelerated after completion of the transcontinental railroad in 1869, when the first overland shipments of fresh deciduous fruit began, and within two years eastern markets were receiving over 100 cars annually from northern California. The

Two Oaks, home of F.B. McKevitt. His son Frank (far right) ran the fruit business.

E.T. Earl Company pioneered most of these early shipments, including those from the Vacaville district, which came into the transportation network after completion of the rail spur from Elmira to Vacaville in 1869.

While fruit production and marketing techniques were still being perfected, a new type of immigrant began to appear: the commercial orchardist. One of the first was Leonard W. Buck, a prominent Iowa merchant who brought his family to California after the collapse of business following the panic of 1873. Attracted, some say, by the longevity of local fruit trees, in 1875 he purchased the 156-acre Weldon ranch in northwest Vaca Valley and began planting peaches. Combining capital resources and executive ability, Leonard rose rapidly, and by the early 1880s he was the community's most successful fruit grower.

Another transplanted New York family, the Alexander McKevitts and their teenage son Frank, arrived in 1877 to take up land near their friends the Bucks. In ten years Frank B. McKevitt had become one of the leading fruit growers and shippers of the area. Building on his father's orchard in upper Vaca Valley, McKevitt enlarged his holdings and moved into the shipping business, first as organizer of the Vacaville and Winters Fruit Company, and later as a cofounder and area manager of the Pinkham and McKevitt Fruit Company, which did business both in Vacaville and in the southern San Joaquin Valley.

Although Frank McKevitt's fruit business prospered, the Buck family held undisputed leadership in the Vacaville district. Leonard Buck's success as an orchardist launched a brief political career, and in 1882 he was elected as a

Frank H. Buck, Sr. (seated at right), Vacaville's most successful early businessman, posing with other members of the family. His son followed in his footsteps.

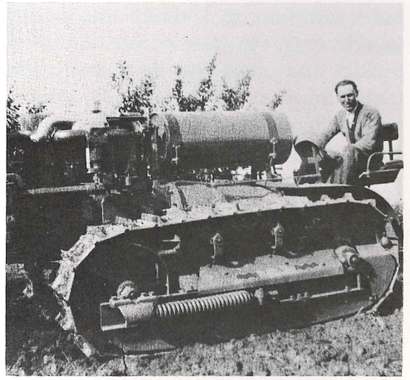
Democrat to the state senate. From then on the local management of the family partnership, known as the Buck Company since 1881, fell to Leonard's eldest son, twenty-three-year-old Frank H. Buck. He was admirably suited to the role. College-trained in horticulture, experienced in the business as his father's right-hand man, and undistracted by the temptations of a political career, he stuck to business and prospered mightily. By the end of the decade the Buck Co. was the largest shipping firm in the area; the Buck name, aided by the influx of other relatives from the East, was prominently affixed to a variety of business ventures and local landmarks; and the Buck influence was felt throughout the fruit industry. Vacaville could not contain such success; over the next two decades Frank Buck expanded the family fruit operations into the San Joaquin Valley, profitably invested in southern California oil and Oregon lumber, and removed the company offices and his residence to San Francisco to be nearer the financial heart of the West and to enjoy the cultural fruits of the Bay Area. At his death in 1916 his estate was the largest probated in Solano County up to that time.

While the Bucks and the McKevitts found prosperity in the bottomlands, the fruit boom of the eighties also swept over the rolling hills to the northeast, named after James R. English, a noted Sacramento attorney and judge who was also one of the principal landlords in the area. It is said that he acquired the land in lieu of fees for services rendered to land barons short on cash.

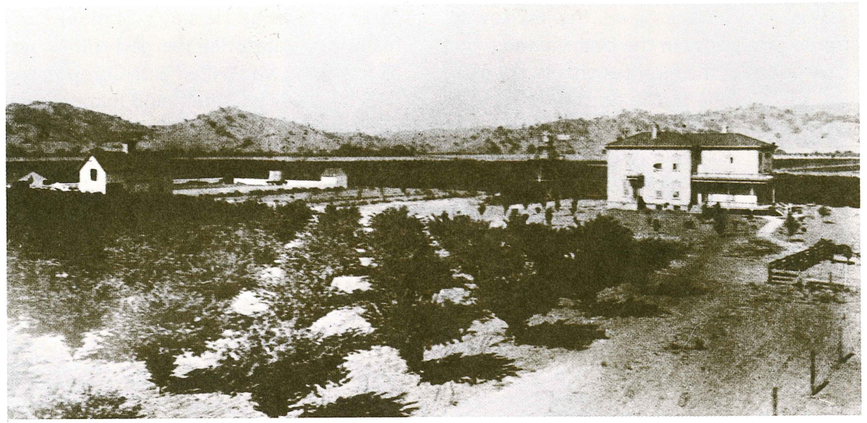
At the beginning of the boom most of the English property was virgin land where cattle and sheep fattened on the succulent native grasses and brush. In the seventies a small group of Italian farmers, after a four-year trek across the continent in search of suitable land, settled on part of the English estate and on other lands to the north. They cleared away the native vegetation and planted vegetables and grapes. When the fruit boom arrived Joseph Barty and his brother-in-law, Frank Rago, were among the first farmers in the English Hills to convert. Other Italian families soon followed their example.

While Judge English sold a considerable part of his holdings to the Italians and others, he kept a magnificent tract, which was soon entirely planted in fruit. Management of the English property was left in the capable young hands of the judge's grandson, Clement Madison Hartley, a Sacramento native who eventually acquired the property outright. Taking advantage of the nearby railroad spur through Brown's Valley, he organized the Hartley Orchard Company, built a packing shed along the tracks, and shipped his fruit at what inevitably became known as Hartley's Station. Later his family enterprise merged with others to form the Vacaville Fruit Company, of which he was president and manager. He also became one of the town's leading bankers—as did most fruit company executives who gravitated naturally into the loan business by financing most of the growers who shipped with them—and for many years he was manager of the Bank of Vacaville, later absorbed by A.P. Giannini's Bank of Italy.

Another orchard-businessman who arrived in the eighties was William Boyd Parker, a native of Scotland who emigrated to Canada as a child and eventually reached California by way of Pennsylvania and Wisconsin. Parker raised cattle and sheep in Shasta and Plumas counties. He also entered politics, serving two terms as county clerk, one as tax collector, and another as deputy sheriff. By the time he arrived in Vacaville in 1882 he was both well known and well



Paul Pippo in the '20s with a new "cat"

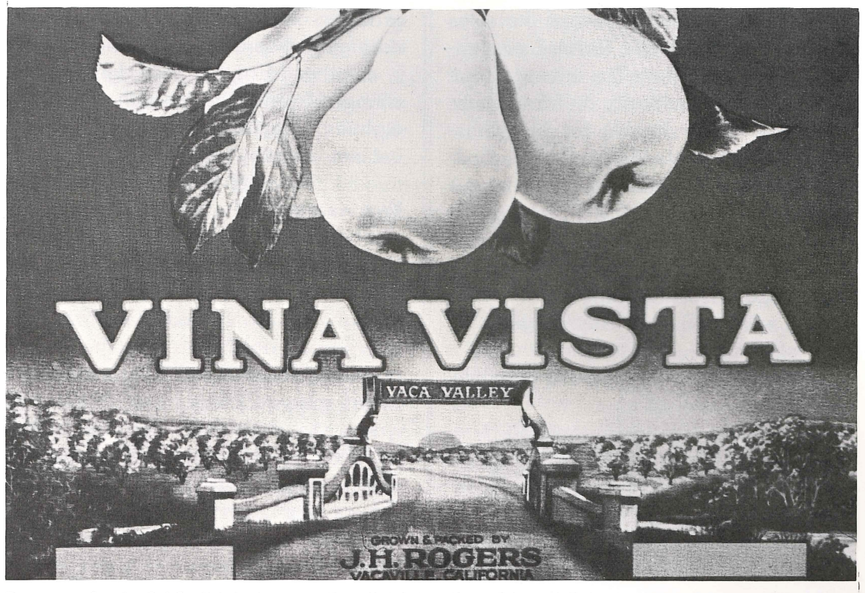


Located in what is now the southwestern part of town, the 300-acre Parker ranch was a prominent Vacaville landmark as late as the 1940s. After the war it gave way to subdivisions.

heeled. From one of the earliest settlers he purchased 500 acres of grainland in the southern end of Vaca Valley and converted it all to orchard, making the Parker ranch one of the largest single holdings in the valley.

Parker also brought his political ambitions with him; in 1884 he was elected to a term in the state senate. Although politics and other diversions frequently took him away from Vacaville, his primary interests remained in the Parker orchard. Unable to resist the lure of skyrocketing land prices he subdivided and sold portions of it from time to time, but at his death in 1904 he still held 300 acres in what is now the southwestern end of the city along Interstate 80. The "Parker Ranch," although in different hands, remained largely intact until the subdivision boom after World War II.

Two sons of "Judge" Parker are noteworthy, for each rose to prominence in his own right, although not in the fruit business. Carlton H. Parker, a child when his parents moved to Vacaville, grew up on the Parker ranch and perhaps became intrigued by the thorny problems of the fruit industry, for he left to become a national authority in the field of economics. After receiving a Ph.D. from the University of Heidelburg in 1912, he became a professor at UC Berkeley and later at the University of Washington. His career came to an untimely end during World War I. While working for the government as a principal investigator of labor unrest involving the Industrial Workers of the World—or "Wobblies" as they were derisively known—he caught pneumonia in a remote labor camp and died. His younger brother Challen, born in Vacaville, became a prominent New York banker but also met a tragic end when



Dozens of colorful fruit labels gave the district nationwide publicity in the golden age.

his car crashed in 1939 on a blustery winter day in downtown Manhattan.

Several families of later prominence in the community caught "orchard fever" in the eighties. One was led by J.N. Rogers, a New Yorker whose family dated back to the earliest colonial times. Orphaned at age five and raised by his uncle, a retired army surgeon, Rogers came to California the first time in 1869 on a brief trip, returned ten years later, and married the daughter of a San Francisco pioneer. In 1882 he purchased a quarter section of open land in upper Vaca Valley, planted it in fruit, and prospered. The Brazelton family also located in Vacaville during the eighties. John William Brazelton, a Tehama county rancher, came to Vaca Valley in 1885. After a few years as an orchardist he moved to town because of failing health, leaving other Brazeltons to carry on a "budding" fruit business.

Early in the eighties the Burton brothers, James H. and Richard E., two young blacksmiths from England, sold the shop in Vacaville that they had operated since 1874 and purchased a huge ranch from Suisun banker R.D. Robbins. Finding it too big to handle, they disposed of the property after a couple of years and acquired a more modest tract, which they gradually improved and enlarged.

The brothers had complementary tal-

ents; James handled most of the sales and distribution while Richard concentrated on production. The latter became a considerable authority on horticulture and was widely known for his painstaking experiments to improve the product. His work eventually caught the eye of Luther Burbank himself, who occasionally came to Vacaville to study the experiments of Burton and others firsthand. Richard's most important contribution was the Burton Prune, a giant the size of a small orange that became a favorite drying prune among specialty growers until the market collapsed during the Depression.

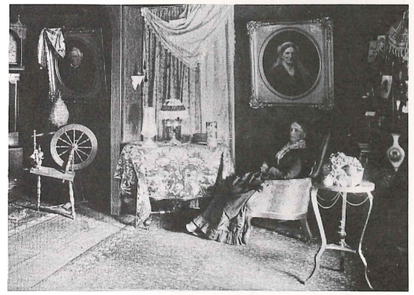
Another English immigrant who changed from artisan to orchardist in the eighties was Charles Mudge Chubb, a cabinetmaker by trade who came to town in 1883 to construct a stairway for the Victorian mansion of W.W. Smith on what was later known as Ulatis Ranch. Impressed by the affluence he saw in the district, he soon purchased an orchard, brought his family from San Francisco, and settled down to enjoy the bucolic pleasures and pains of fruit husbandry.

Sidney Clay Walker, in contrast to Chubb and the Burtons, began as a rancher but switched to other lines of work. A Kentucky native, he crossed the plains in the 1850s, settling first in Suisun Valley and then, in 1872, in Vaca Valley, where he combined a 400-acre tract purchased from the Peña heirs with a 320-acre homestead on government land. In 1886 he sold part of his estate—by then totaling a baronial 1,200 acres—and moved into a handsome residence on the corner of Davis and Catherine Streets. He was one of the organizers of the Vacaville Water and Light Company in the 1890s, and in 1897, on a site nearly leveled by the earthquake of 1892, he constructed a two-story opera house complete with 600 seats and electric lights from his light company. The Walker House was a vast improvement over its immediate predecessor across the street, the unheated and poorly lit Bowles' Opera House, which had burned down in 1895, but live theater days in Vacaville were numbered. After Walker died in 1908 the building was converted into a movie theater and later a lodge hall and commercial shops. It still stands on the southeast corner of Main and Davis streets, a monument to the golden days of the fruit era.

The narrative thus far, as is appropriate to nineteenth century America, has covered men only, which makes the story of Mrs. Elise P. Buckingham an even more interesting study in contrasts. In the 1880s women's liberation was known as "feminism," and although Mrs. Buckingham perhaps did not think of herself as a feminist, she gained statewide fame as an innovator and leader in California agriculture in a day when women's work was confined almost entirely to home and family.

Early in the 1880s, after divorcing her husband, a San Francisco shoe manufacturer, Mrs. Buckingham purchased a 400-acre tract from one of the Peña heirs and founded Lagunita Rancho in Lagoon Valley. Four years later she bought the 1,000-acre "Butcher Tract" and sold half of it in a public auction (for more than she originally paid for the entire acreage) to buyers from as far away as England and Holland. Using her profit and remaining 500 acres, Mrs. Buckingham became the driving force behind a highly productive and lucrative family business yielding over 600 tons of fruit annually. The **San Francisco Examiner** in 1893 called her one of the most prominent women in California. Despite her landed wealth and social status, she lived for over a decade on Lagunita Rancho, isolated from the cultural attractions of her former home in San Francisco but in-

Mrs. Buckingham at home in Lagoon Valley



Farm wives had many "chores," like drawing water for the stock—and the kitchen.

tensely involved in the daily management and operations of the Buckingham orchards.

Mrs. Buckingham's home for that decade was one of the oldest houses in the county. Built by the Peñas it was paid for with cattle hides and tallow produced on the great rancho from which Vacaville was originally carved. It was constructed from lumber cut in Maine from an architect's pattern, individually numbered, and shipped around the Horn. The house remained standing for over 100 years, but unfortunately, like most of Vacaville's historic buildings, it was allowed to deteriorate and eventually was torn down for scrap.

Mrs. Buckingham gradually turned over the ranch management to her son Hugh, who also built a lasting reputation as a business and civic leader. It was Mrs. Buckingham, however, who had the foresight and opportunity to invest when the time was right, and her success in a field dominated by men can be regarded as a major achievement in California women's history.

Mrs. Buckingham was not the only colorful character to enrich the Vacaville fruit district in the boom years. Another was James D. Ladd, an Ohio native whose Quaker father had strong abolitionist views. Born into this abolitionist setting, Ladd naturally took up the banner. His Ohio farm became a way station on the underground railroad, and at one time he was allegedly a business partner of the fieriest abolitionist of all time, John Brown himself.

Abolitionism was not Ladd's only mark of distinction, though. He married Elizabeth Folger, daughter of Captain Mayhew Folger of the H.M.S. **Bounty,** immortalized by Charles Nordhoff and Hollywood. After Ladd's first wife died in 1868, he remarried, less famously this time, and settled down to a sedentary farm career in Iowa. In 1888, seeking a warmer climate, he moved to Vacaville, invested in the fruit business, and lived out his remaining years as a gentleman farmer.

Ladd was preceded in Vacaville by a man of exactly opposite political views. R.H. Chinn, known affectionately as "Captain," had a most spectacular career, if we can believe his obituary, which at least was not written by himself. Born in Kentucky in 1826, he lived with the family of none other than Henry Clay, the "Great Compromiser," and then attended Transylvania University where he studied to be a druggist.

As a Southerner in the days before the Civil War, Chinn naturally thought blacks were inferior. One day he and a group of college friends, who had closed their books for the day in order to see a stage show in town, were deeply humiliated by a sign in front of the theater that read "Negroes and College Students, one-half price." They stormed the theater, demolishing all the chairs and windows, and were promptly arrested—by Richard Long, who would later become Vacaville's town recorder.

After the theater incident, Chinn moved to New Orleans to practice his pharmaceutical profession for a few years, but on a steamer trip to New York his boat was wrecked in the middle of the Gulf of Mexico, and only Chinn and eight other passengers survived. They floated for a week on a flimsy raft without food or water, finally drifting ashore somewhere in Central America. All were near death, and to restore strength they allegedly ate one of the unlucky survivors after drawing lots to see who would have to die.

Chinn spent a year in Central America, presumably dining on more traditional fare, and returned to New Orleans just in time to join the Confederate Navy. During the war he smuggled guns through the Union blockade but was captured and sentenced to two years in prison. Unimpressed, he bribed a guard with $150 and escaped to Cuba. It was 1880 before he returned, with a small fortune earned in some unknown venture, and evidently with a wife as well. Heading west, he stayed in Chico only two years and then came to Vacaville to invest in the fruit business. By that time he was past fifty and full of stories, some of which doubtless stretched the truth a bit. But he was a hit at social gatherings, and when he died in 1900 the town lost an unforgettable character.

Marketing

Like the lucky prospector who struck paydirt and triggered a gold rush, the prosperity of a few fruit growers and the stories others told fired the imaginations of many small farmers who mined the soil of Vaca Valley and the English Hills. Like the gold miners thirty years before, Vacaville farmers discovered that prosperity for all was more dream than reality. Still there was enough wealth in the district to sustain the orchard boom for well over a decade. Experienced growers soon realized, however, that real prosperity depended on three conditions: a cheap and abundant labor supply, a rapid and efficient transportation system, and a market that could be controlled by growers and shippers. Some fruitmen worked all their lives to secure these conditions, but in the long run the fruit business was never stabilized to the satisfaction of those who staked their fortunes and careers on commercial fruit production.

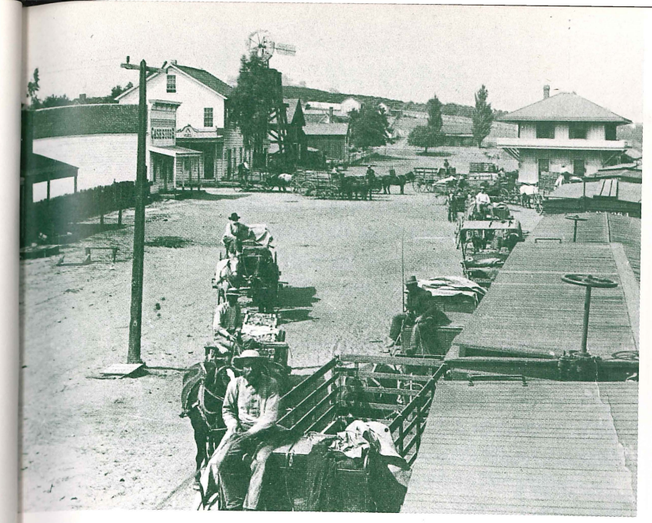
Finding a market was the first order of business to commercial fruit growers. The most notable advance in the marketing of Vacaville fruit occurred in 1876, when John Patton Lyon, combining patriotism with business, shipped a carload of Pleasants Valley grapes to the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia.

Despite inadequate refrigeration and route delays, most of the fruit arrived in good condition and sold at a handsome profit. It remained to be seen, however, whether fresh fruit could be marketed successfully on a regular basis. Given sufficient consumer demand, profit depended on good advertising, adequate refrigeration, speed of shipment, predictable sales and distribution, and reasonable freight rates. Until these conditions were met with some degree of efficiency and consistency, the fruit industry would remain an unstable and highly speculative enterprise.

Shipping and marketing improvements were much slower to develop than fruit production itself in the Vacaville district. By the early 1880s the area was already producing much more fruit than could be consumed locally. Most of this early commercial production went to regional markets, particularly in the Bay Area, and a good part of it was dried rather than shipped fresh, for dried fruit had obvious advantages in a period when transportation was slow, often unpredictable, and physically damaging to tender green fruit. Consider the effects of a long wagon haul over a bumpy dirt road, for example. Another alternative was canning, and considerable study went into the canning business during the 1880s, but canning proved no advantage to a district noted for early harvest, and it never became a major part of the local industry. In short, the key to prosperity in Vacaville was early shipment of fresh fruit to eager eastern markets, and local orchardists had to await technological improvements before real prosperity arrived.

Fruit marketing took a giant step forward in 1885, when Leonard Buck, A. T. Hatch of Suisun, who was Solano County's largest individual fruit grower, and a handful of Sacramento Valley fruitmen founded the California Fruit Union, one of the first growers' marketing organizations for the fresh fruit industry. With Hatch as prime mover and Buck as manager, the CFU set the pattern for the entire industry, and consignment shipments to eastern auction houses became standard practice for the next seventy years. CFU had agents in Chicago, New York, St. Louis, Kansas City, and other major eastern and midwestern markets, and CFU carlot shipments rose steadily until they reached 3,000 by 1893. Buck and Hatch also made immense technological advances by improving the refrigeration of fruitcars during shipment. By the end of the century the "reefer" had already become essential to the industry, although many more improvements were needed before the modern refrigerator car was perfected.

Coops and Commission Shippers. As a cooperative marketing association, the California Fruit Union offered Vacaville growers an alternative to private commission shippers such as the Earl Fruit Company, the Pioneer Fruit Company, and the Frank H. Buck Company. Although the goals were similar, coops and commission shippers differed in both ownership and management. Under the cooperative, growers in effect became



In the Vacaville Early Fruit District, the distance from packing shed to rail head was no more than twelve miles, usually less. Before the Buck Company and other shippers built their own loading docks, farmers had to load directly onto boxcars along Depot Street. These classic photos show the Bucktown packing sheds, probably around 1900, and a line of teamsters ready to load primitive "reefers" in 1887.

shareholders in a common enterprise. They selected a governing board from among their members, hired a manager, built a local packing plant, worked out a marketing arrangement with fruit brokers in key cities such as Chicago or New York, and split the income according to the amount of fruit each member shipped. In order to prevent competitive underbidding or volume uncertainties, members were bound by the terms of membership to pack and ship only with the cooperative.

Private shipping companies had similar marketing and accounting procedures, but growers had no voice in the management and paid commissions to the shippers for handling the fruit. However, growers had more marketing flexibility with private shippers, and there were no membership rules and regulations. Bound mostly by seasonal or limited term contracts—or by the chattel mortgages that shippers who loaned money to growers often held—growers were free to change shipping companies after a season or two if it seemed profitable to do so. Usually, however, few changes were made. In small towns like Vacaville, shipper and grower established a bond of mutual respect and loyalty that transcended the profit motive and carried on year after year despite the economic ups and downs in a very risky business.

Problems of Consignment Shipping. Almost all Vacaville fresh fruit shipped east, whether by cooperative or by commission merchant, was delivered on consignment to a broker and sold at auction in Chicago, New York, Boston, or other large urban centers. From the growers' standpoint the consignment-auction system was the most unsettling part of the fruit business, for once the crated fruit was sealed in refrigerator cars, those most concerned had no control over delivery and sales. After a ten-day trip the cars arrived at the eastern terminus to be unloaded at a display shed where individual crates—stacked ten to fifteen high depending on size and type of fruit—were inspected by prospective fruit buyers just before sale.

Although auctions were supposed to be open to all customers, growers often accused the bigger dealers of conspiring with broker and auctioneer to keep the bids low by closing the auction to smaller bidders and thus reducing sales competition. The lopsided responsibilities of the system were apparent to everyone on the growing end. "It is not right or just," complained one California producer, "for the fruit men to furnish all the labor and capital in the business and stand all the liabilities and let the eastern men who have not a single dollar in the business reap all the benefits."

The flaws in the consignment business led many growers to advocate selling fresh fruit in the field and shipping f.o.b. from the packing house or loading dock, but without a united front and quality control that alternative was nearly hopeless. Considering the unpredictable market fluctuations, the transportation uncertainties, and the absence of production controls, the lack of interest among

fruit dealers in f.o.b. sales is understandable. Eastern brokers preferred the guarantee of a fixed commission for handling western fruit to the uncertain profit that might accrue in a good year if the fruit arrived in good condition and if the trade was brisk and the demand strong on the day of sale. But California growers had to bear all these risks, not learning until they received the final statement whether costs of production and marketing had exceeded gross income. In bad years they closed their books in the red.

Growers' and Shippers' Associations. California commission shippers were not immune to the debit side of the fruit business. Their prosperity depended on the success of the growers who shipped with them, especially if the shipper had helped finance their production and harvesting costs. Mutual interest thus provided a common economic bond between shipper and grower, a bond that was reinforced in small, rural districts like Vacaville by close social and interpersonal relationships.

Converting these mutual interests into a strong, united organization dedicated to improving marketing conditions became a primary goal of industry spokesmen like Leonard W. Buck and Harris Weinstock. However, the basic ties among fruitmen were offset by competition among rival shippers, conflicts between big and little producers, and the stubborn resistance of some maverick growers to join any but the most innocuous horticultural societies. Buck's California Fruit Union in 1894 folded, partly because of internal squabbling among its own members. The next year Weinstock, a Sacramento merchant, organized the California Fruit Growers and Shippers Association, which eventually included most of the larger northern California shippers, such as the E.T. Earl Fruit Company, the Buck Company, and the California Fruit Association of Vacaville, the latter a newly organized but unprofitable and short-lived cooperative. Weinstock's association lasted until 1902, but it was no more successful than its predecessor in uniting the industry.

Despite these early failures, organizational efforts increased after the turn of the century. The most successful cooperative in the deciduous fruit industry was the California Fruit Exchange, organized in 1901 as a federated statewide marketing association devoted to selling the fruit of its members at a profit, eliminating or reducing the use of consignment auctions, improving transportation and distribution, and establishing quality control over the industry. The CFE grew slowly, shipping only 201 cars, or 3 percent of California's fresh fruit production, in its first year of business. By 1909 it was affiliated with fourteen local cooperative associations, including the Vacaville Fruit Growers Association, organized the same year by Thomas H. Buckingham, Clarence J. Uhl, and three other local growers.

Buckingham and Uhl were both latecomers to the Vacaville fruit district, but both rapidly advanced to positions of leadership. The only son of Mrs. E.P. Buckingham, Thomas Hugh Bucking-

ham, Jr., had assumed management of his mother's Lagunita Rancho in Lagoon Valley by the turn of the century. Clarence Jerome Uhl was an Ohio native who came to Vacaville in 1889 at the encouragement of a shirttail relative, Daniel K. Corn, a leading local merchant. In 1904 Uhl and Frank McKevitt jointly purchased the 235-acre Dobbins ranch, but two years later Uhl took over McKevitt's half interest, thus becoming sole proprietor of one of the most productive and important tracts in the district.

Advocates of cooperation in the fruit industry, Uhl and Buckingham joined five other investors to organize the Vacaville Fruit Company in 1908. Capitalized at a modest $10,000, VFC was an independent shipping firm that gradually came under the control of its manager and principal investor, Clement M. Hartley, Sr. In 1909 Buckingham and Uhl pulled out to form the Vacaville Fruit Growers Association, which prospered for twenty years under their leadership.

Complicating the rise of the California Fruit Exchange was the existence of the California Fruit Distributors, a rival statewide coalition of independent shippers founded in 1902. By 1910 almost all northern California commission merchants belonged to the CFD, including the Vacaville firms of Frank H. Buck, Pinkham and McKevitt, and theVacaville Fruit Company. Initially controlling over 80 percent of California fruit shipments, the CFD gradually lost ground to the Fruit Exchange and other statewide marketing cooperatives.

The CFD was also plagued by internal rivalries, as Frank McKevitt, Sr., discovered after becoming manager in 1909 and moving to Sacramento. In 1910 one of its member firms, the Earl Fruit Company, was purchased by Joseph DiGiorgio, an Italian-born, eastern-based fruit merchant who wanted to expand westward. McKevitt had shipped all of his fruit to DiGiorgio and evidently had played a considerable role in attracting DiGiorgio to California. Two years after taking over the Earl Company, DiGiorgio led a drive to secure control of the CFD. A DiGiorgio-backed eastern fruit grower was selected president of the association, and under his management the association tried to require all members to deal exclusively with Atlantic Fruit Distributors, a DiGiorgio-dominated eastern brokerage. Leery of eastern dominance, CFD members soon began to pull out. Frank Buck was one of the first to withdraw, and the Pioneer Fruit Company, a San Francisco-based firm with Vacaville connections, threatened to follow unless the DiGiorgio interests backed down. Pioneer had its way, for DiGiorgio did not get exclusive distribution rights, and increasing criticism of Frank McKevitt forced his resignation as CFD manager in 1913.

In the meantime, the CFD continued to decline. Some of its former members, including Frank H. Buck, joined the Pacific Fruit Exchange, a rival federated corporation organized in 1911 at Sacramento. Others joined the American Fruit Company, an eastern transplant with major western interests. By the mid-twenties the CFD had lost most of its

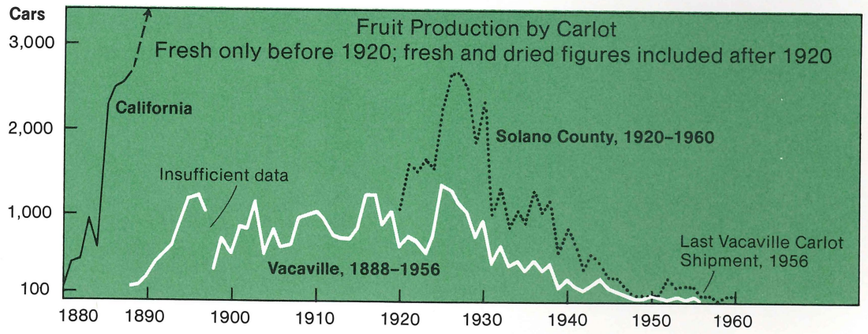
members, and it folded in 1927.

The evolution of larger and more powerful fruit companies, either cooperative associations or commission houses, helped bring some measure of order to an unstable industry, but on the eve of World War I the fruit growers' ultimate goal, market control, seemed as elusive as ever. Competition within the industry, transportation problems, wide variations in quality, and over-production continued to frustrate the fruit growers, who turned more and more to the idea of government regulation as a last resort.

Between 1910 and 1915, at a series of regional meetings encouraged by the new progressive administration of Hiram Johnson and sponsored by the state horticultural commissioner, growers and shippers concluded that the salvation of the industry depended on standardization laws to ensure uniformity in packing, sizing, and grading. Based on their recommendations, the state legislature passed California's first fresh fruit standardization law in 1915. It was a major step forward, but standardization codes broke down under the production pressures of World War I, and the search for order began all over again in the 1920s.

Conclusion

Fresh fruit was the key that unlocked the door to prosperity in the Vacaville district. The fruit business passed through a period of rapid growth in the 1880s, consolidation and retrenchment in the 1890s, and slower but sustained advance in the mellow years before World War I. For thirty years after 1895 the district shipped to eastern markets an average of 900 carloads per season, reaching a peak of over 1,350 carloads in 1925. But even by producing more, Vacaville couldn't keep up the prosperity of earlier years. Postwar recession and rising competition combined to undermine Vacaville's economic status. Never again did Vacaville reach the mark it had attained in 1895 when the district produced over 25 percent of the fresh deciduous fruit marketed in the state. If the "golden age" lasted until the twenties, the "glory years" clearly ended by the turn of the century.



The Labor Issue

Among the economic problems in the Vacaville fruit business, the labor issue was the most complicated and perplexing. Not only did it involve the traditional economic conflicts that have always divided labor and management, but also it was inextricably bound up with basic human passions and prejudices.

Migrant Workers

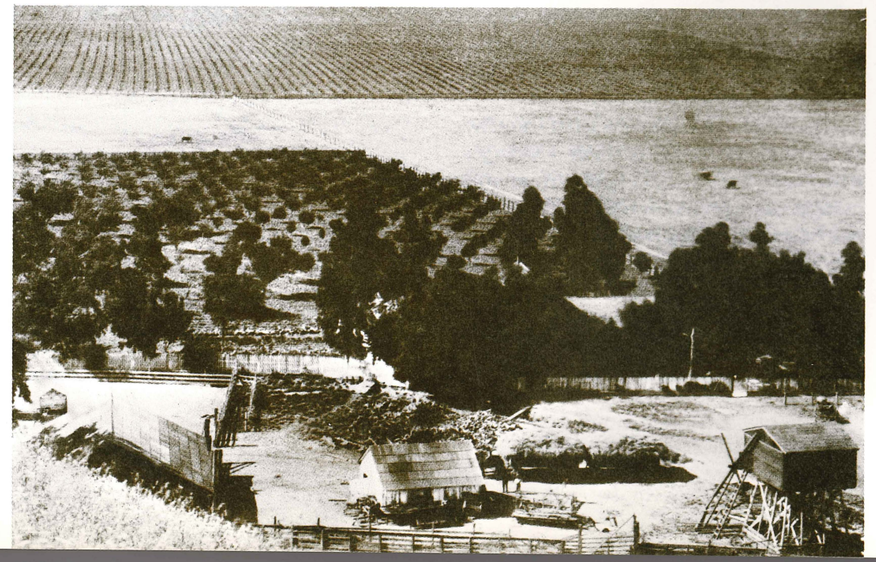
Harvest season in Vacaville lasted longer than in other fruit districts because of the wide variety of species being produced, but still the labor demand was seasonal, and it reached a peak during the hottest months of summer. The labor supply was largely composed of migrants who moved from one agricultural district to another as the season and crop dictated. The Vacaville district swelled to a population of perhaps 5,000 in the summer months, but shrank in winter to its permanent population of 1,200. This ebb and flow, however, did not always coincide with the amount of work available, and the district sometimes found itself cursed with either an oversupply or, more often, a shortage of labor.

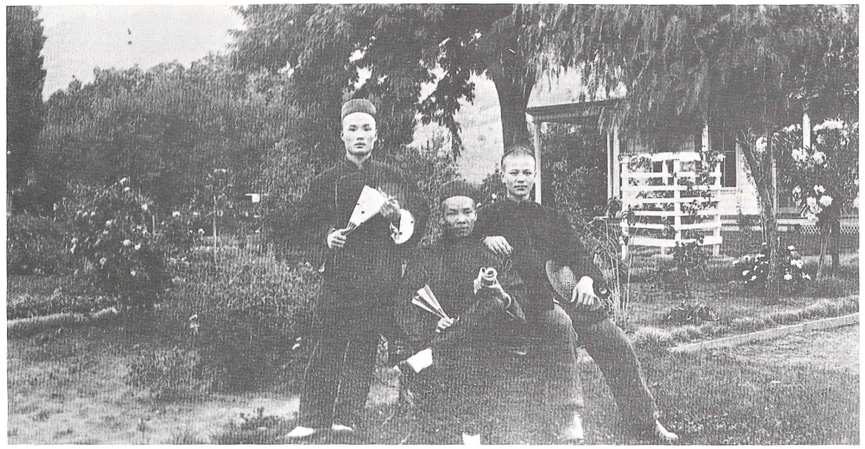
From the growers' standpoint, the problem of quality was as troublesome as the quantitative uncertainties. Commercial orchardists, as businessmen, wanted labor that was efficient, dependable, and cheap. Above all they emphasized economy, but they also tried to get reliable and hard-working help. However, the low wages paid transient field hands did not always attract the most ambitious and industrious, and the growers were unwilling or unable to raise the pay scale for fear of squeezing the profit margin at the other end. Indeed, farmers found labor costs the only variable they could control, for they were never able to organize sufficiently to dictate the market value of their commodities, and outsiders fixed the production costs for such things as farm machinery and freight fees. Therefore they paid their hired hands as little as possible, making salary adjustments according to yearly fluctuations in fixed costs and market values.

The laborers who received these low wages were also trapped by economic and social circumstances that left them at the bottom of the wage scale and the social order. Poverty was the universal condition of the migrant worker then as now, although today's migrant is better off than his or her nineteenth-century predecessors. County medical care, unemployment compensation, state welfare, food stamps, social security, subsidized housing, and other forms of public assistance were inconceivable in a laissez faire society that still had faith in the bootstrap philosophy of Horatio Alger. Those who failed to ascend the economic ladder were by definition lazy and deserved whatever fate had in store.

Already burdened by an economic stigma, nonwhite migrants also had to face age-old racial antagonisms that still persist. Rooted in economic uncertainties as men and women of different races competed for the same jobs, racial prejudice had a fertile breeding ground in late nineteenth-century California, where the social matrix was composed of people from almost every conceivable economic, social, and ethnic background. To be a white migrant was bad enough, but to be Negro, Chinese, Japanese, Hindu, Filipino, or Mexican—all groups that worked in Vacaville orchards at one time or another—was to bear an additional burden that made the struggle for survival all the more difficult.

An early view of the Hawkins ranch east of town. A.C. Hawkins began farming here in 1852.





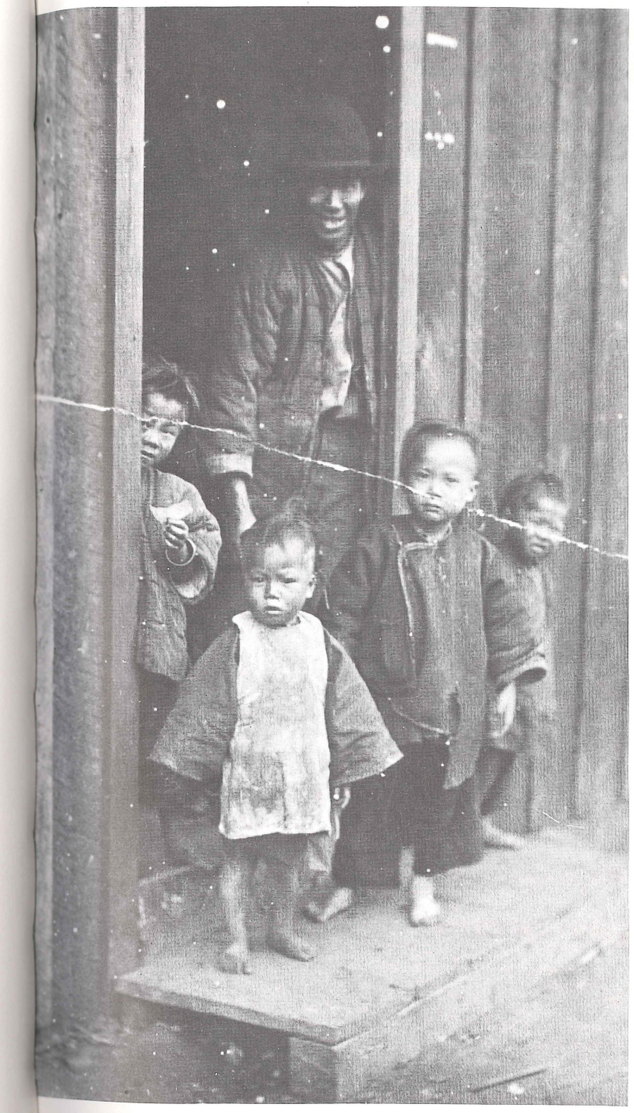
The Chinese

The first sizable ethnic group in the Vacaville orchards was the Chinese, who turned to farm work as employment declined in the mines and on the railroads. Almost all were Cantonese males with families still in China. Like the forty-niners from beyond the Mississippi, they came intending to work a few years, earn their fortunes, and return; but the longer they stayed, the harder it was to leave. Compared even to the rough-edged American miner, whose creature comforts were few, the Chinese lived frugally, sending home most of their earnings, crowding into dirty hovels, surviving on a meager diet of rice, a few vegetables, and bits of pork or fish. Like American males during the gold rush and after, they took their ease with gambling, women, and drugs, only their drug was opium instead of liquor and their prostitutes were Chinese instead of white.

Traditional histories have stressed the cultural differences between Chinese and white, but it is instructive to remember the similarities, for both wanted essentially the same things: employment, wealth, pleasure, security, family, and social status. Had they been truly different in goals and values perhaps there would have been less white prejudice, but their willingness to work long hours at low wages with few complaints made them a competitive threat of the first order, and as an ethnic minority with a separate culture they were easy to isolate and victimize.

Vacaville's Chinese community increased rapidly in the late 1870s and early 1880s as the fruit culture expanded. Despite growing anti-Chinese sentiment, especially among the unemployed white workers in depression-ridden San Francisco, growers on the larger ranches and orchards claimed that white labor scarcity made Oriental employment essential. While Dennis Kearny shouted "the Chinese must go!" from his sandlot soapbox near San Francisco's City Hall, W. J. Dobbins and other Vacaville orchardists hired as many Chinese as they could and continued to do so as long as the supply lasted. By the time the first Chinese Exclusion Bill passed in 1882 probably a majority of the Vacaville orchard labor force were Chinese. According to the Vacaville **Judicion**, by 1885 at least 1,500 Chinese were at work in the township.

Most of these Chinese workers were supervised, not by the white orchardist who hired them, but by a Chinese labor contractor who acted as foreman and intermediary for a percentage of the workers' pay. This labor boss was a powerful man. He handled all communications and financial arrangements between labor and management, and usually he also negotiated the housing and commissary arrangements while the labor crews were in the field. Sometimes he was crooked, as one Chinese crew found out when Nom Kee, a Vacaville contractor, tried to skip out without distributing the wages he had collected from the operator. Two of his crew caught up with him on the road back to Vacaville and killed him with the pistol he drew to defend himself. Most contractors were more scrupulous; they played an important role in organizing the Chinese work force and bridging the gap between field hand and proprietor.



The Chinese and their families added an important element to Vacaville society.

Chinese Exclusion Policies

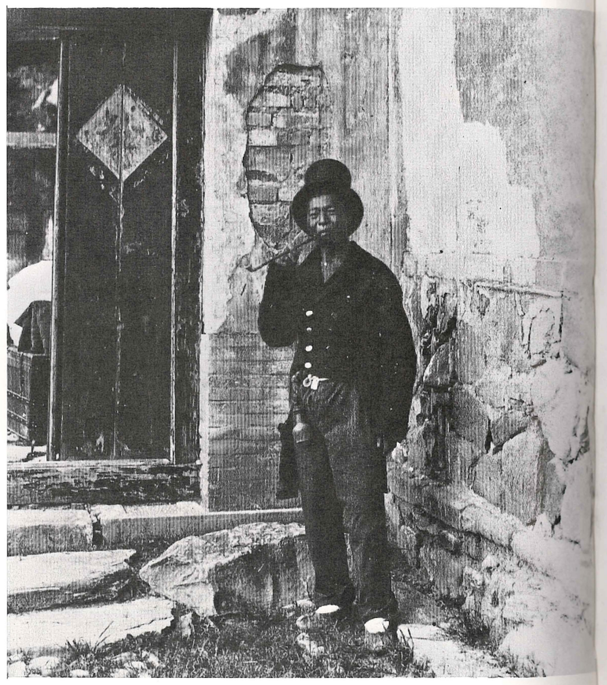
The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 banned further immigration of Chinese laborers but did not prevent resident Chinese from bringing their wives to California. Doubtless some men arranged rather expeditious marriages to ensure female companionship. Others used their savings earned on railroad construction and farm work to sail back to China, marry girls from their villages, and return to the States. Yee Gim Wo, a Cantonese whose father had worked in the Mother Lode mines in the 1850s, followed the latter pattern.

Emigrating from China in the late 1860s, Gim Wo returned in 1889 to marry and came back to California a few months later. In 1891 he moved to Vacaville with his wife and a daughter and established a small restaurant on the corner of Kendall and Dobbins, complete with a tiny noodle factory in the basement. By the turn of the century his family had grown too large to live in the restaurant, and they moved across the street into a tin-sided building that also housed another Chinese family. The restaurant remained in the Yee family for years, but Gim Wo made most of his money selling Chinese lottery tickets for one of the two lottery companies in town. His best customers, according to Yee Ah Chong, his son, were the Japanese.

The influx of Chinese women and the resulting baby boom kept Vacaville's Chinatown alive despite continued anti-Chinese agitation in the eighties. Not satisfied with the Exclusion Act, extremists wanted to deport all the remaining Chinese. When legal means failed they resorted to violence, terrorizing many helpless Chinese and murdering many more. No community escaped this unrest, although it was worse when good jobs were at stake.

In towns like Vacaville, where the Chinese held jobs few whites wanted—at least under normal circumstances—race agitation was less violent, generally taking the form of slurs against the "filthy habits" of the Chinese, frequent raids on Chinese opium parlors and fan-tan

A young Chinese man with opium pipe



games, and discrimination in housing and business locations. In the late eighties an effort was made to import Negroes as a means of squeezing out the Chinese, but only a few arrived and those, according to a Vacaville correspondent to the **Pacific Rural Press**, "some meddlesome fool persuaded away to hunt larger wages." Growers therefore hired Chinese workers out of necessity. Indeed, they were so dependent on Chinese labor that in 1886 the Vacaville Fruit Growers Association passed resolutions condemning extremist agitation and urging caution in efforts to remove the Chinese labor force.

Despite the restraining hand of the fruit growers, Chinese exclusion gradually took its toll. As the eighties advanced the domestic supply of Chinese laborers diminished, and those that remained grew older and less efficient. Still they were highly desirable workers. To keep what Chinese they had, white employers became more patronizing, erecting tenements on the premises, hiring on a year-round basis, and using older bachelors in domestic service. In the homes of the more affluent orchardists and businessmen, Chinese cooks and houseboys became permanent fixtures. They lived out their days in benevolent servitude. Long after they died their bones were exhumed and returned to the Celestial Kingdom in a canvas bag.

Panic, Depression, and Prejudice

Labor troubles in Vacaville increased in 1893–94, when a nationwide depression sent economic shock waves radiating through the country, closing hundreds of businesses and throwing thousands out of work. By the spring of 1894 the national ranks of the unemployed had swelled to more than 2½ million. Debt-ridden, demoralized, and reduced to begging for food and shelter, job hunters crammed into the big cities in a vain search for work. The absence of public relief made conditions all the more desperate, for private charities could not handle the new burden, and little help could be expected from the second Cleveland administration.

In Ohio Jacob Coxey organized a band of the jobless poor and marched on Washington to demonstrate before Congress, but after they arrived the police clubbed the marchers and arrested Coxey for walking on the grass of the Capitol grounds. "Coxey's Army" publicized a new tactic in the fight for jobs, however, and "industrial armies" soon formed in other parts of the country.

Because of the area's proximity to the volatile labor centers of Sacramento and San Francisco, the Vacaville Chinese and their white employers soon felt the effects of industrial army unrest. In a depressed economy any job was a good one, and whites who formerly refused orchard work now had second thoughts, especially if Chinese were working and whites were not. As the depression deepened, harassment of the Chinese and their employers increased. Labor organizations stepped up demands for stricter enforcement of the recently enacted Geary Law, which required all Chinese, alien or native, to be deported if they failed to

register with state immigration authorities and pay a fee within a stipulated time limit. Many farmers received threatening letters, warning of dire consequences if they did not turn out the Chinese and hire white workers.

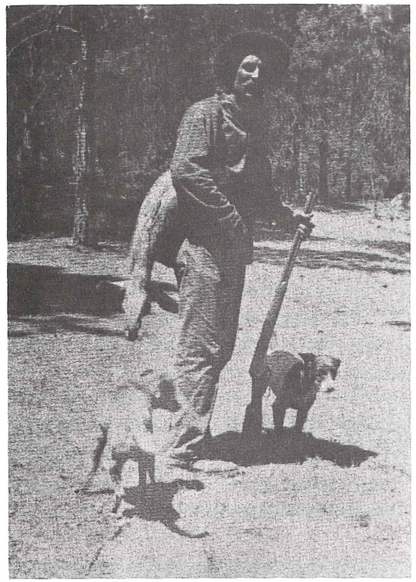
In May of 1894, while Coxey and his followers were still camped in Washington, a group of nearly one hundred Sacramento men gathered in Vacaville, held a weekend rally, passed resolutions condemning white growers who used Oriental labor, intimidated field hands in Vaca Valley, and demanded jobs. One grower called their bluff and promised he would hire fifty of them when work began Monday morning, but no one showed up on the appointed day. Instead, the marchers paraded to Winters to repeat their demonstration.

When word reached Vacaville that the agitators had threatened to burn Winters, a mounted force of angry residents, led by Constable Bradley, rode to the aid of their neighbors. They met the marchers on the road, arrested eighty-four, and escorted them to jail in Fairfield, confident that the law would bring an end to the activities of these "labor tramps." But Fairfield jurors had other ideas. They acquitted the "tramps" of all charges after a brief trial in the last week of May.

While the majority of Fairfield and Suisun residents seemed to favor the verdict, there was shock and outrage in Vacaville. Raleigh Barcar's editorial in the **Reporter** reflected the prevailing local sentiment: "Law and order in Solano County has received a severe blow at the hands of the twelve citizens of Fairfield, who, by their verdict say it is no crime for a body of men to march through Vaca Valley plundering and destroying property, threatening lives and driving Chinese and Japanese away from their homes." Determined not to let "justice" again go unavenged, a number of prominent Vacaville residents organized a Law and Order League to take matters into their own hands if the "tramps" once more got out of hand. It was the town's first vigilance committee, but it would not be the last.

Labor unrest continued in June, but with considerably less rhetoric and bluster on both sides. Contrary to popular local belief, most of the unemployed were not professional bums but legitimate workers looking for jobs. They found few in the fruit district. Without counting the Orientals, the area was so overcrowded with workers by the spring of 1894 that the papers reported twice as many men as jobs. As the national depression increased so did the ranks of the unemployed, and they drifted despairingly from one town to the next, walking or riding the rails and sleeping in hobo camps or wherever they could find shelter.

For drifters between Sacramento and the Bay Area the banks of Putah Creek seemed to be especially attractive. Constable Bradley had his hands full trying to keep these men out of Vaca Valley, and the town jail was soon overloaded with vagrants Bradley found bedded down in refrigerator cars, haystacks, and orchards. The Law and Order League hired Charles L. Foster, a San Francisco detective, to dress up as a tramp and spy on the camps. On the basis of his information ten of the "more vicious" vagrants were arrested on the Yolo side of Putah Creek and sent to Woodland for prosecution. The Vacaville jail could not hold any more even if they were vicious, and ten of those that had been held broke out early one morning with apparent ease. Four were soon rearrested and given fifty days in the county jail, but the typical sentence for first offenders was a warning to leave town in two hours and not return. By the end of the month the activities of Constable Bradley, detective Foster, and the Law and Order League had discouraged enough migrants to reduce their local visibility if not their numbers. Vacaville's reputation as a "tough" town for labor organizers and vagrants began with this stand against the unemployed in 1894; it would be emphatically reasserted during the Communist agitation forty years later.



Vaca Mountain hunters John Mix (packing deer), Roy Coleman (bottom center), and friends

Japanese in the Fields

The Chinese in Vacaville survived these attacks just as they had ten years before when the anti-Chinese movement was at its peak, but by the middle and late 1890s they were no longer the district's primary work force. Taking their places in the fields and cutting sheds were Japanese nationals driven from their overcrowded homeland in search of new jobs and opportunities.

The first contingent of Japanese orchard workers reached Vacaville in the summer of 1888, and their success soon brought others. White growers welcomed them at first, for they worked even harder than the Chinese and appeared to be more fastidious in personal habits. But they were also more united and aggressive, qualities that soon dispelled the growers' illusions about having found the "ideal" worker.

In 1891 during an acute labor shortage, Japanese workers in Pleasants Valley struck for higher wages, demanding a raise from $1.00 to $1.15 per day. Even the complacent Chinese went out at the same time, throwing the district in turmoil until white strikebreakers could be secured. Neither side gained from the experience, growers losing some crops and Orientals losing their jobs, but it was a portent of things to come.

Japanese immigration to Vacaville increased annually until the "gentlemen's agreement" of 1907. By 1900, despite the Chinese labor drain, the resident Oriental count in the township stood at 1,500, with Japanese far outnumbering the Chinese and taking over the bulk of the orchard employment. Strikes also increased, but without much effect except to discourage white employers, who routinely refused to bargain and blacklisted the strikers.

The Japanese were not content to remain hired hands. Many invested their earnings in orchard property, purchasing or leasing from white proprietors. By 1902 Japanese owned 350 acres in Vaca Valley and rented another 6,300 acres for cash or sharecrops—more than a third of the total orchard land in the valley. Absentee ownership was becoming the characteristic pattern of land development in the fresh fruit district, with whites turning over more land each year to Oriental tenants and moving into town or outside the area entirely.

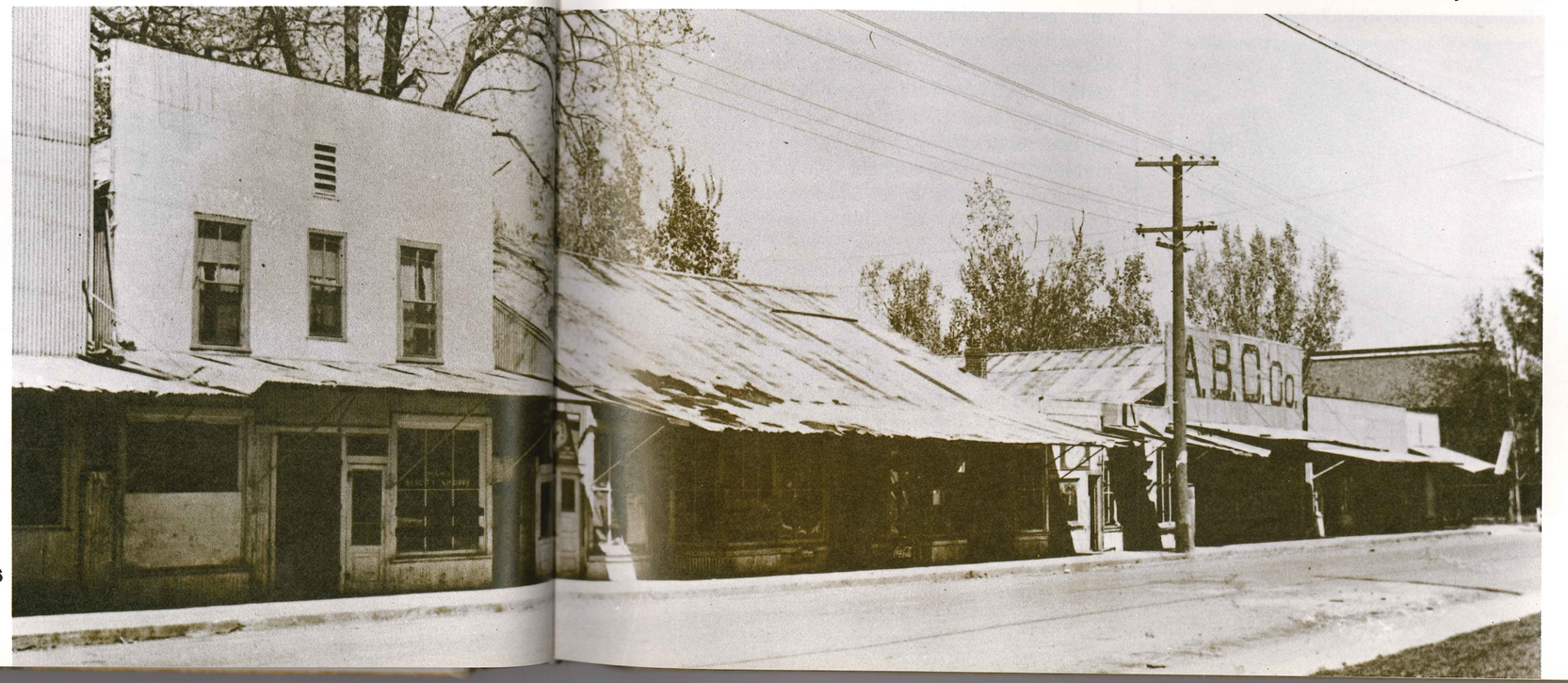
Japanese in the Town

Japanese numbers and influence also increased within the incorporated limits of Vacaville during the same period. A thriving Japanese district developed adjacent to Chinatown and gradually absorbed most of the older Oriental district as the Chinese population declined. Japanese merchants, not satisfied with serving only their countrymen, solicited business wherever it could be found and delivered goods to white doorsteps as a trade inducement. White merchants hardly appreciated the competition, as this **Reporter** editorial of 1902 suggests:

> We see altogther too many Jap teams travelling the streets of Vacaville, and the highways of Vacaville township. It was not a long time ago that ranchers gave their Japs orders for hundreds of dollars worth of provisions at different stores in town. Now ninety-nine percent of this trade is enjoyed in Japtown. It is not a good sign. The Japs were highly complimented by some merchants when they were cash costumers [sic]. But as cash sellers it is naturally a different matter.

As the Japanese district grew so did the impact of Japanese culture on Vacaville. Resident Japanese erected a Buddhist Temple, ornate and imposing compared to the unadorned Chinese Joss House down the street. As early as 1892

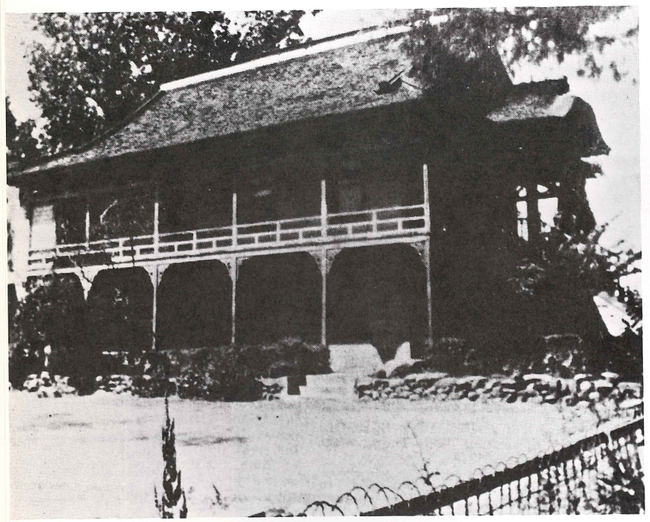
By 1905, local Japanese had become important not only in the fields but also in the trades. Vacaville's Japanese business district, shown here in its later days, extended for two blocks along Kendal and Dobbins Streets north of Main. A federal housing project replaced these shops in 1944.



Christian Japanese made plans to establish a local church. By 1907 they had raised sufficient interest and funds to carry out the project, but then racism intervened.

White property owners protested the construction of a brick building for Japanese use adjacent to white residences near the corner of Kendall and Parker streets, even though, as trustee chairman Frank McKevitt pointed out, it "conformed to all the requirements of the ordinance." Bowing to those "opposed to having the Japanese gain a foothold in another part of town," the trustees turned down the request, and the Christian Japanese looked elsewhere for a site. They finally built a frame church with shingled exterior on the east side of Boyd Street near the southern boundary of town and hired Reverend H. Tanaka, a recent graduate of Drew Theological Seminary, to be the first pastor.

The Japanese Buddhist Temple



Japanese Assimilation

The Japanese demonstrated a facility for American customs in many ways. Japanese baseball clubs represented Vacaville in Japanese leagues for decades, although semipro ball was not integrated before World War II, and only in high school did Japanese and white play together. In 1896 local Japanese took the lead in organizing the Fourth of July celebration in Vacaville, complete with a reading of the Declaration of Independence by T. Hada and and patriotic oration by T. Matsuoka. In the afternoon white audiences were treated to a Japanese fencing exhibition.

Patriotism among the Japanese also extended to their old homeland, especially during the Russo-Japanese War when several local residents left to participate. As they departed they were escorted by hundreds of their countrymen who waved both Japanese and American flags. A three-day celebration honored the emperor's birthday in 1907.

Innocent though they might have been, such gestures exacerbated the loyalty issue that was already surfacing in 1900. To allay white fears and improve Japanese-American relations, local Japanese organized the Doshi-Kai Association in 1905 and five years later established a local branch of the Japanese Association. Both were designed, in their sponsors' words, to "promote

social and friendly relations and especially to uphold the dignity of the Japanese people of the country." During World War I the local chapter of the association contributed generously to the Red Cross and purchased $1,150 in war bonds during the third Liberty Loan drive.

The "Yellow Peril"

Had loyalty been the only issue the Japanese question in California eventually would have faded, for Japanese Americans, like other immigrants who made the United States their new home, gradually lost their ties to the old homeland and became thoroughly "Americanized," if not during the first generation, then certainly during the second. Actually the principal issue was not loyalty but economic competition complicated by racism.

California whites felt menaced by the "yellow peril," which they feared would soon overwhelm the entire Pacific slope. Seemingly outfarmed by Japanese farmers and outcapitalized by Japanese capitalists, they clamored for protection. Refusing to allow their Japanese competitors to operate under the same economic rules they wanted to apply to themselves, California whites by 1907 were demanding that limits be placed on Japanese population growth and landholding. They were not satisfied with the "gentlemen's agreement" by which Japan voluntarily agreed to curtail emigration permits; they wanted legal guarantees and they took their demands to both state and federal lawmakers.

The first alien land law was introduced in the California legislature in 1907, passed six years later, and was tightened up in 1920 after Japanese found loopholes and transferred leases or titles to their American-born children. To formalize the immigration ban, Congress in 1924 enacted a new law that effectively prohibited any more Asians from coming to this country to live. The 1924 restriction stood forty years until replaced by a more equitable immigration program.

Vacaville played a major role in provoking the alien land laws, for by 1907 the town had gained national notoriety because of its heavy Japanese veneer. In December 1906, the California Bureau of Labor Statistics issued a report showing that the town was practically at the mercy of Japanese merchants and farmers who dominated the community. Six Japanese stores controlled more than half the town's general trade and 90 percent of the farm supply business. The Japanese population varied from 900 to 1,200 permanent residents and up to 2,000 during the harvest season. According to the report, the Japanese labor monopoly forced white orchardists to bow to Japanese wage and price demands, and most whites invariably sold or rented to Japanese for lack of other options.

This report was followed by sensational articles in the San Francisco, Sacramento, and Fresno papers, including one report likening Vacaville to a Tokyo suburb. This was national news, and **Collier's Weekly** in 1907 sent Will Irwin to investigate. His article, published October 19, gave a more balanced picture but confirmed that the Japanese domi-

nated the community. He also repeated a common local complaint that probably did as much to account for declining land values as falling fruit prices. Japanese leaseholders, he said, pruned lightly to reap the heaviest crops without regard to future tree health or productivity. Orchards operated by their owners, on the other hand, were in much better condition. Of course the same criticism might have been applied to any leaseholder, but the Japanese bore the brunt of the blame for running down the orchards.

The key to Japanese power was their orchard labor monopoly, which apparently was almost complete by 1907. White migrants either avoided the district or were not hired if they did show up, and some evidence exists to indicate that Japanese labor leaders put pressure on local white orchardists to hire Japanese only. Alienated by such tactics and embarrassed by the adverse publicity, white growers and merchants joined forces to locate alternative sources of manpower. One possibility was India. Late in November, the first contingent of Hindus arrived in Vacaville and went to work cutting wood for C. M. Hartley. They were not employed extensively in the orchards, however, and growers who used them were not pleased by the results. It was perhaps just as well, for within three years cities like Seattle and San Francisco were clamoring for a permanent ban on further Hindu and Sikh immigration.

Spanish Again

In the meantime another ethnic group found its way to Vacaville, at first attracted by the high salaries paid at the Portland Cement Company's plant on Cement Hill near Vandan Station, and gradually moving into orchard work. In early 1908 Theodore Ryhiner, an expatriate German musician who had lived in Spain before moving to Vacaville, reported that nearly one hundred Andalusians were working in Suisun, Cordelia, and Vacaville orchards. Calling them "the best class of working people" on the market, Ryhiner urged local growers to hire them at good wages, build pleasant labor camps, import their wives, and welcome them to the social activities of the community. Even if growers did not adopt all these suggestions, their enthusiasm for the Spanish workers encouraged others to come, and by 1911 a considerable Spanish colony had been established.

One such group from Spain was led by Manuel (Frankie) Nofuentes, who still resides in Vacaville. Nofuentes, with his wife, Dolores Espinal Espinosa, organized a group of workers in southern Spain in 1911, and, choosing between emigration to Africa, Brazil, or Hawaii, decided to go to Maui, Hawaii. They found work as laborers and tool sharpeners in the sugar cane plantations, but they decided to leave Hawaii and go to the Pacific Coast of the United States. Mr. Nofuentes remembers that passage from Hawaii to Vacaville cost thirty-four dollars and that about forty-five Spaniards reached Vacaville in January 1913.

Like the others, Manuel Nofuentes found Vacaville to his liking—somewhat like Spain with its hills, valleys, open

spaces, and warm climate—and he stayed on to work in town and in the fields and to raise his family. Today, he has four daughters—Mrs. Lola Moriel, Mrs. Mary Sanchez, Mrs. Frances Martin, and Mrs. Lupe Rivas—and many other descendants who live in or near Vacaville.

Another Spanish family that came in 1913 was that of Manuel Escano, Sr. He had also worked in the Hawaiian sugar fields but came to Vacaville to settle and open a mercantile business and a ten-acre fruit and vegetable ranch. He stayed on and was succeeded by his son Manuel Escano, Jr.

In Vacaville most of the Spanish immigrants tended to congregate in the southeast section of town, and they organized a Spanish Society to keep alive language and traditions. As new immigrants who spoke little English they faced some discrimination, but as Europeans they dispersed into the general population more readily and easily than the Orientals.

Resignation to Japanese Power

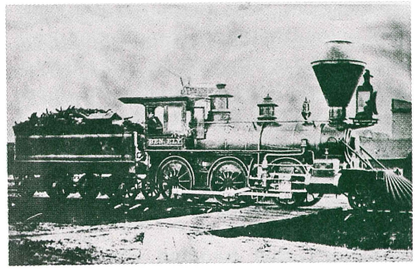
Despite community encouragement, the Spanish never came in sufficient numbers to displace the Japanese or even to make serious inroads on the Japanese labor market, at least during the first two decades of the century. Resigned to the realities of Japanese power, the larger growers learned to live with it. In spite of the anti-Japanese agitation, particularly by outsiders who had no real understanding of local conditions, most white orchard owners were not anxious to dispossess their Japanese renters although they did want to expand the labor supply.

Some growers even complimented the Japanese, as did Frank McKevitt during a meeting of area fruit growers in 1909. He called them "Yankees of the Orient" who should be praised for wanting to improve their lot in life. At the same meeting was Col. John P. Irish, a leader of conservative Democrats in California. While some delegates squirmed, Col. Irish condemned the Chinese exclusion policy and said both the Chinese and Japanese had been victimized by hostile labor unions that exerted enormous pressure on the lawmakers in Sacramento. Unwilling perhaps to visualize the Japanese as victims and scapegoats, local growers did recognize the importance of Japanese labor in an industry that could not attract the best white workers.

Growers depended on the shipping companies that handled the fruit to supervise Japanese cultivation, pruning, harvesting, and quality control, and the companies had little difficulty in getting the Japanese leaseholders to cooperate. Indeed, shipper and lessee were interdependent, since the shippers controlled the means of distribution and the Japanese controlled the labor supply. Both sides recognized and accepted their mutual interests even if they did not necessarily welcome the symbiosis.

Anti-Japanese agitation continued on a lesser scale after the second alien land law and the 1924 immigration act, but the Japanese in Vacaville clung to their important, if not comfortable, niche in the social and economic life of the community. They held that niche until they were forcibly removed during World War II.

Vacaville's Railroad Era



The success of the fresh fruit industry in Vacaville depended on fast, safe, and cheap rail transportation. By 1869 Vacaville had rail connections to the East, and by the mid-1870s fruit shipments were made on a regular commercial basis, but for thirty years thereafter growers struggled to improve rail service and, most important, to lower freight rates. Eventually another rail line entered the town to break the Southern Pacific monopoly, but the "SP" continued to dominate the industry with better equipment and more direct routes to eastern markets. Technological advances, increased competition, and consumer demand all helped improve freight and passenger service for a few years after 1900, but neither the railroads nor their customers in the fresh fruit district were ever fully satisfied.

The Vaca Valley and Clear Lake Railroad

In 1877 Andrew and Bushrod Stevenson reincorporated the little Vaca Valley railroad that connected Vacaville to the main SP line, extended the line to Madison, and added "Clear Lake" to the name. The Stevenson brothers dreamed of laying tracks to Mendocino County timber supplies, but the Vaca Valley and Clear Lake Railroad never even lived up to its corporate name. As an independent feeder with thirty miles of track, a single locomotive, one passenger car, ten flat cars, and a few other pieces of rolling stock, the railroad ran on a shoestring until 1888. It always managed to keep its books in the black, though, and by 1887 it was showing an annual net profit of $26,000 and had begun constructing a stretch of track to Rumsey.

In the meantime the Central Pacific's Big Four had reorganized and were rapidly absorbing California short lines into the sprawling Southern Pacific system. The SP bought out the Stevenson brothers early in 1888 but retained the branch line's corporate name. With Southern Pacific land agents leading the way, the Vaca Valley company pushed rapidly to Esparto, Capay, Cadenasso, Guinda, and Rumsey. It went no further, however, and in 1934 the Capay-Rumsey section was abandoned. Evidently the Clear Lake dreams were long forgotten.

New management on the Vaca Valley road did not change the railroad's informal but friendly service. Riding on rough wooden seats in an unheated passenger car with the aisles crammed full of baggage was not perhaps the ideal way to travel. But passengers liked the trainmen, partially because they could usually be persuaded to make an unscheduled stop even though it was officially forbidden. One dark night in 1888 a farmer's wife stopped the train three times between Capay and Rumsey before she found her house by the sound of her barking dog! The train finally arrived in Rumsey two hours late.

Even the SP's main-line crews tried to be accommodating, though not always successfully, as County Superintendent Daniel Corn discovered on a Saturday night in 1891. Delayed by business in Dixon, he missed the regular passenger run back to Elmira. He was helped aboard the next freight by a friendly conductor who explained that the train didn't stop at Elmira but would slow down so he could hop off. Evidently the engineer didn't get the message, for the train barely slackened speed as it approached Corn's destination. He jumped anyway, tumbled head over heels, picked himself up in a daze, and started walking. Vacaville was nearly in sight before he realized he had broken his collarbone.

Fighting Rate Discrimination

If personal service made up for physical discomforts on the passenger runs, nothing but lower freight rates could placate the fruit growers whose chronic and often bitter battles with the Southern Pacific were part of a larger agrarian crusade against railroad rate discrimination that colored much of the nation's history between the Civil War and World War I.

Even discounting overblown rhetoric, Vacaville growers, at least in the eighties, had reason to protest: they paid nearly twice as much to deliver fruit to eastern markets as other nearby shippers. From Sacramento to Chicago in 1883, the freight rate was $500 per fruit car; from Vacaville to Chicago the rate was $800. These rates dropped and became more equitable during the next two decades, but not as much as Vacaville growers felt they should.

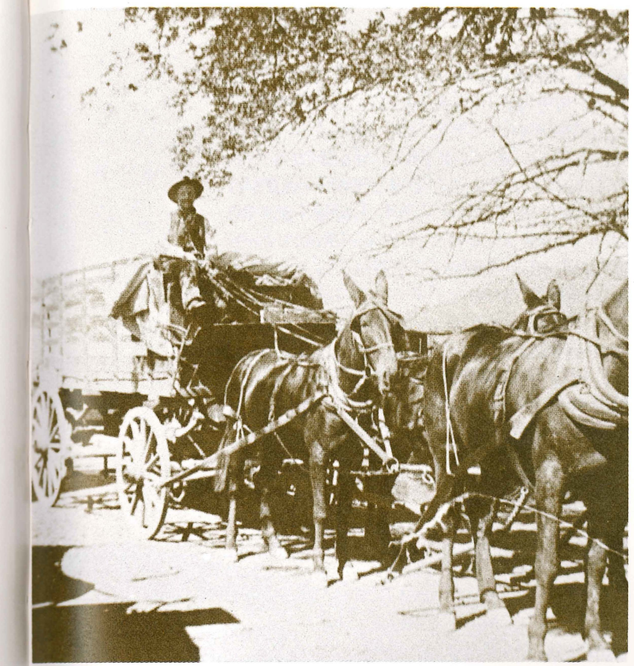
Railroad officials explained rate discrepancies by distinguishing between big and little shippers, long and short hauls, and main-line service and way traffic. Long-haul rates between major terminal points such as Sacramento and Chicago were much lower per ton-mile than short-haul rates along feeder lines, because short hauls required more time, effort, and overhead. For example, to handle Vacaville freight the railroad had to use switch engines and extra personnel to distribute empty cars to local sidings and return them to Elmira where a local freight brought them to the central mixing yards at Roseville. Vacaville shippers understood and accepted reasonable freight differentials, but they believed the Southern Pacific rates were exhorbitant, and the railroad's tactless admission that it charged as much as the traffic would bear stiffened their opposition.

Battle with the Southern Pacific

Between 1870 and 1910, breaking the power of the Southern Pacific was an absorbing passion for most California farmers and merchants, including those in Vacaville. So long and bitter was the struggle, and so pervasive the antirailroad rhetoric, that only recently have revisionist historians begun to tear down the stereotypes and reconstruct a more balanced picture of Southern Pacific's role in California history. The freight rate controversy was only part of the conflict, which involved political and economic issues beyond the scope of this book, but Vacaville was an active participant in at least some of these battles, and it cheered from the sidelines in others. On the railroad question, there was neither apathy nor objectivity before World War I.

Poor public relations contributed to the railroad's bad image. Railroad tyranny had become an obsession with most Californians who read exposés describing Collis P. Huntington's generous payoffs to state and federal officials or gazed, with a mixture of envy and contempt, on the splendid Nob Hill palaces of Leland Stanford, Mark Hopkins, and Charles Crocker. Not content to monopolize, "the railroad" seemed to take satanic delight in bribing, intimidating, and otherwise manipulating those who came under its influence or depended on it for a living.

In an atmosphere of mutual hatred and suspicion even presumably legitimate actions could become grounds for attack. In 1888, for example, a delay in Vacaville fruit deliveries to San Francisco was attributed by company officials to construction work near Port Costa. But Vacaville newsman J.D. McClain called the delay "a deliberate attempt . . . to injure our interests." "Does the railroad



John Mix, whose family settled Mix Canyon in the 1870s, poses with his team.

company want the earth?" he asked melodramatically. Two years later McClain took personal credit for getting the railroad to resume delivery of morning mail to Vacaville after it had been arbitrarily stopped, evidently as an economy move.

More serious was the railroad's lockout during the Pullman Strike in 1894. After Eugene Debs' American Railway Union declared a boycott of all Pullman cars, Southern Pacific and other railroads refused to run the trains unless the Pullmans were attached. As a result railroad business across the country came to a standstill. To Californians the SP lockout was another example of the unlimited powers of the "octopus." "It is safe to say," declared the Vacaville paper, "that the Southern Pacific has not a friend on the Pacific Coast outside of those dependent upon it. Its low and contaminating influences are felt and abhorred upon every side." When company officials turned a deaf ear to desperate appeals from California fresh fruit shippers whose crops were rotting in immobilized freight cars, an editorial in William Randolph Hearst's **San Francisco Examiner** spoke for all California fruitmen:

> And this is the company that asks for public sympathy because it has been drawn into the trainmen's dispute with Pullman. Its cruelty is appalling and amazing; its stupidity is awful. It cannot see that it is doing the very thing it condemns in the men in a thousand times more barbarous manner, for they have all along been willing to move trains rather than detain passengers or spoil freight.

Although Vacaville growers lost a lot of fruit during the strike, many growers were able to salvage much of their fruit by drying. The fact that the district was able to ship 1,200 cars of green and dried fruit for the 1894 season, an increase of 52 percent over the previous year, indicates the local industry was not as severely crippled as antirailroad literature seems to suggest. Nevertheless the effects of the strike and the railroad's "public be damned" attitude heaped salt on open sores.

The Growers' Ammunition: Coops, Law, and Competition

Despite other railroad irritations, the freight rate problem remained the number one priority for California fruit growers. To attack the problem they used two different strategies: (1) fighting monopoly with monopoly by organizing marketing cooperatives with the collective power to negotiate freight rate reductions, and (2) breaking the monopoly through divestiture or competition.

The California Fruit Union was the first major collective effort in the northern California deciduous fruit industry. Between 1888 and 1894 the CFU took advantage of the railroad's offer to reduce rates on single shipments of fifteen cars or more, by representing the largest growers and shippers who could combine lots to meet the requirements. But the CFU was no panacea; it did little for the smaller growers, and it was under constant criticism because of its marketing arrangement with Porter Brothers, a Chicago-based brokerage firm that had exclusive rights to handle CFU fruit. For several years CFU manager Leonard W. Buck kept members in line despite internal squabbling and external rivalry, but the union collapsed during the economic upheavals following the panic of 1893.

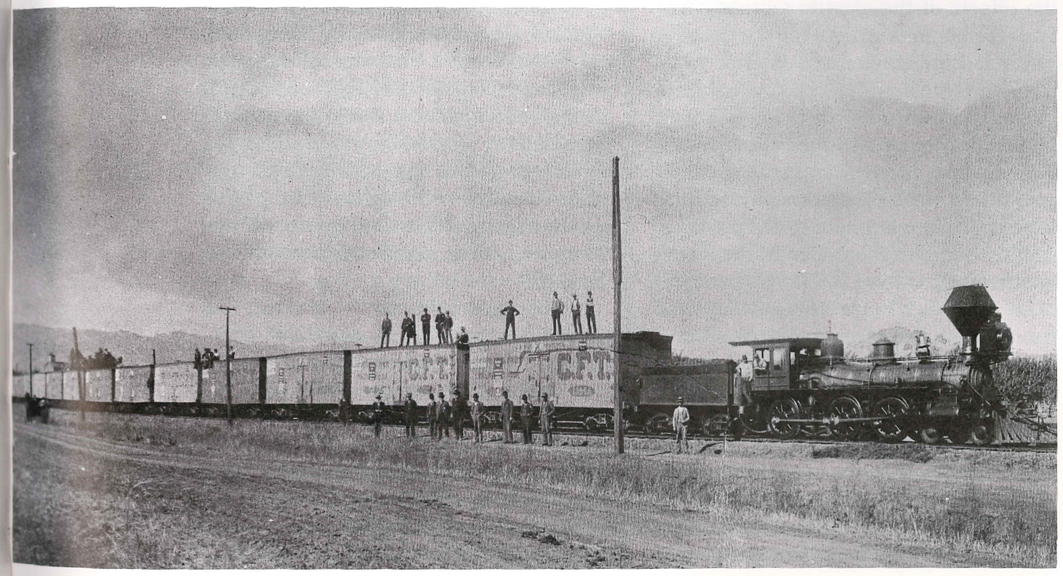
Other cooperatives followed the CFU, the most successful being the California Fruit Exchange, which has dominated the deciduous industry since the late 1920s, and its counterpart in the citrus industry, the California Fruit Grower's Exchange, known worldwide by its "Sunkist" brand. But, despite desultory and often frustrating efforts toward consolidation, railroad rates did not drop as dramatically as organized shippers and growers desired.

Divesting the Southern Pacific of its accumulated parts was like trying to untangle a Gordian knot with your nose. Antimonopoly legislation was too weak to begin with, and it was further emasculated by conservative court opinions defending private property rights from public interference. Only the indomitable will of an outraged United States president had forced the Northern Securities Holding Company to break up in 1904, and that was a much more flagrant case of monopoly than the smaller Southern Pacific system.

For a time in the 1890s California populists hoped to slice away the Central Pacific and operate it as a public enterprise after C.P. Huntington refused to pay back the government loans that had financed construction in the 1860s. Congress eventually allowed the SP to refinance the loans and thereby prevented a showdown. When Huntington died in 1900 the bulk of his estate, including controlling interest in the Southern Pacific, passed to his wife Arabella and his nephew Henry E. Huntington. They sold out to E.H. Harriman who also controlled the Union Pacific. Harriman's control over both the SP and the Union Pacific soon came under attack by antimonopolists, and the courts finally broke up the combination in 1913. But the dissolution left Southern Pacific with the same holdings it had before the UP merger, so nothing really changed.

Restoring competition seemed more feasible than using legal weapons against Southern Pacific. Antimonopolists in Vacaville had been hatching plans for years to break out of Huntington's grip. Some of these plans seemed farfetched, like damming Ulatis Creek to create locks for fruit boats, or constructing a horse-drawn railroad through Vaca Valley with spur lines running to each packing house, but by 1890 the idea of a competing steam or electric railroad seemed the most sensible. Such plans, however remote, were of course abhorrent to SP officials who responded with promises of better service. Less than a week after he ousted Leland Stanford to become the new president of the road, Huntington toured Vaca Valley and announced, to the surprise of local dignitaries and perhaps even his own lieutenants, that Southern Pacific would soon build a feeder line through the heart of the valley. For weeks the community buzzed with excitement, but soon the papers began calling it a bluff to stifle competition. They may have been right, for railroad officials never mentioned the new line again.

Southern Pacific was able to hold off outside competition in northern California until the late 1890s, when the Santa Fe pushed north from Mojave. By



An SP fruit train in the 1890s, pausing along the old VV&CLRR tracks for a picture. Trains were made up daily in Vacaville at the height of the season, and reached eastern terminals in ten days.

1900 it had completed connections to Oakland, giving San Francisco a long-awaited second transcontinental route and lifting the hopes of SP opponents that competition would soon force rates to drop. In Vacaville, rumors that the Santa Fe would extend to Sacramento were magnified into hopes that new feeders would soon reach into the fruit districts, but both expectations proved false. The south bank of the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta turned out to be the northernmost point of the rival railroad, and Vacaville was too far away to make much use of it.

Electric Interurbans

Hopes rebounded in the first decade of the new century when Solano County felt the effects of the electric railroad fever that was beginning to sweep the country. The need for quieter and cleaner mass transit, particularly in urban areas, had been apparent ever since people and horses first came into close contact with the belching, hissing, and smoking iron monsters of the nineteenth century. Before the development of electric locomotion the best alternative to the steam engine in downtown traffic had been the cable car, which by the 1880s had spread from its San Francisco origins to several cities in the East. But cable transportation had definite practical limits and was also very expensive to install. As a result most urban centers used whatever conveyances they had, however unsatisfactory, and waited for better prospects. They came in the 1890s when the first practical electric transit systems were developed. Growing sporadically during the first decade of the new century, by the beginning of World War I, when the last growth period came to a close, electric railroads served most of the major urban centers of the country.

Situated between two major centers of population that electric railroad promoters hoped to connect, Vacaville residents eagerly awaited the anticipated construction boom. In 1904 they welcomed news that Colonel J. W. Hartzell of Illinois, who was building an interurban line from Napa to Vallejo, had secured a Solano County franchise for a Woodland-Suisun route via Winters and Vacaville, with promises for future connections to Vallejo and San Francisco. Later that same year, for a bid of twenty-five dollars, Vacaville trustees awarded Hartzell a local franchise, which required construction of a line through town to begin by October 15, 1906. Although interurban electrics primarily served passengers, Hartzell's representatives initially proposed to haul freight cars by steam engine to either Suisun or Vallejo, where they would be ferried across the Delta to make connections with the Santa Fe.

For two years the Hartzell interests did little more than collect additional franchises, thereby preventing interference from rivals, but in January 1906 Hartzell, with English capital, incorporated the San Francisco, Vallejo and Vaca Valley Railway and Steamship Company. The plans now called for an eighty-mile electric railroad across Solano County, with fast ferry connections to San Francisco.

Rumors spread that Hartzell was tied to San Francisco investors who wanted to extend electric feeder lines at least to the Sierras and perhaps farther, but the 1906 earthquake disrupted these plans, real or fanciful, and Hartzell died unexpectedly at the end of the year before any construction had begun.

In the meantime other promoters appeared in Solano County, the most active being Melville Dozier, reported by the press to be the chief engineer of Henry Huntington's Pacific Electric in Southern California. Huntington's name, despite its Southern Pacific connotations, cast a golden glow in business circles, and local observers confidently predicted a bright future for Dozier's line, incorporated in November 1906 as the Vallejo and Northern Railway Company. As he announced plans to construct a line between Sacramento and Vallejo via Woodland, Vacaville, and Suisun—nearly the same route as the defunct Hartzell proposal—Dozier denied any connections with either Huntington or the Southern Pacific. However, he did not refute still another rumor that the V&N was backed by Western Pacific, a new company organized to lay track between Oakland and Salt Lake City where it would connect with George Gould's Denver and Rio Grande Western, thus providing the Gould interests with a Pacific Coast outlet. Actually the rumors anticipated Western Pacific's direct connections to Solano County by about fifteen years, as we shall see, although Gould money evidently supported at least some electric interurbans in northern California.

The panic of 1907 and right-of-way problems delayed V&N construction plans nearly four years, long after Melville Dozier left the company and returned to Los Angeles. Southern Pacific held the only good route between Vallejo and Suisun via Jameson Canyon, and the infamous "railroad legislature" of 1907 obligingly expanded canyon rights-of-way by almost twenty feet, making it even harder for competitors to gain entrance. Vallejo and Northern officials eventually undertook expensive condemnation proceedings against one Jameson Canyon rancher to secure a right-of-way paralleling the SP tracks, but the road was never built.

While the Vallejo and Northern was still deep in litigation, another northern California electric railroad began to express interest in Solano County. In 1906 H.A. Butters, a builder of Latin American railways before he turned his attention to the Sacramento Valley, joined forces with investors from Pacific Gas and Electric Company to take control of a small electric line that had begun in Chico. Reincorporated as the Northern Electric, the Butters road was extended to Oroville in 1906 and to Sacramento the following year.

In May 1907, Sacramento newspapers reported that Butters was seeking eastern capital to buy out the Vallejo and Northern, which still had not begun construction, and to complete a branch line to San Francisco via Woodland, Vacaville, Suisun, and Vallejo. The plans were premature, however, for a financial panic wiped out investment capital and delayed

the takeover six years. In the meantime the V&N played a coy waiting game. To hold the franchises it had acquired from the old Hartzell interests and by new promises to city and county officials, it shoveled a little dirt here and there before construction deadlines passed. In Vacaville, two days before the town trustees' deadline of August 8, 1910, a handful of men arrived and laid a single piece of rail on Davis Street. "It is entirely covered over," reported the Vacaville press, "and would therefore escape the notice of the most observing person—but it serves the purpose."

The following year the Vallejo and Northern showed its first real signs of life, launching construction of the Woodland-Sacramento section. Prompted by renewed negotiations for sale to the Northern Electric, the V&N completed its Woodland branch in July 1912, and one month later began the Suisun-Vacaville segment. After a month of preparations, including the hiring of fifty teamsters and work crews, grading began simultaneously in Suisun and three miles south of the Vacaville town limits. "It really begins to look as though the Vallejo and Northern would be running cars into Vacaville sometimes before the members of the present generation are gathered unto their fathers," said the Vacaville editor.

Considering the history of roads like the V&N his reservations were not surprising. It took more than a year to complete the work, during which the Northern Electric finally took over and the Vacaville trustees reluctantly granted another extension on the franchise after the completion deadline had passed. On October 28, 1913, tracklaying crews crossed the town boundary, and seven days later scheduled service began between Vacaville and Suisun.

Failure of the Electrics

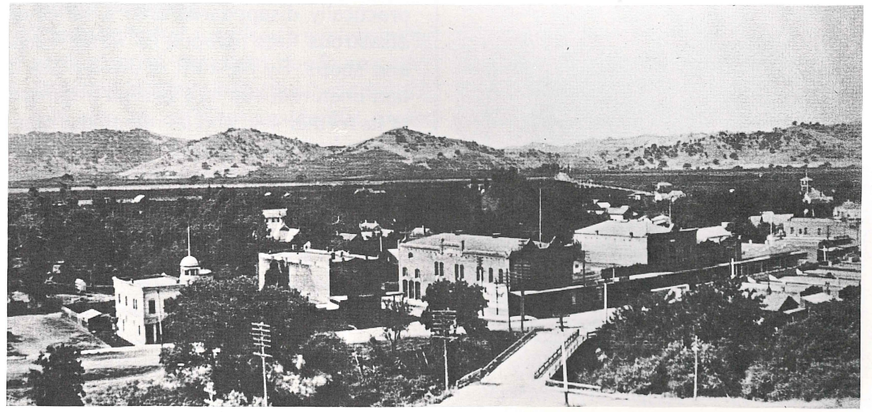
If Vaca Valley farmers expected relief at last from the Southern Pacific squeeze, they were disappointed. The Vacaville-Woodland section of V&N was never built, and Suisun's anticipated steamboat connections to San Francisco and across the Delta to the Western Pacific were largely illusory. Anyway, the real fresh fruit markets were in the East by the fastest and most direct route. Had a direct line to Sacramento been available in 1913 perhaps freight traffic on the interurban might have picked up, but electric railroads, with few exceptions, were not really built for carlot freight service in the first place. Lacking freight equipment and unable to transship without added expense to the shipper, interurban electrics in Northern California simply could not accommodate transcontinental freight traffic and had to depend almost entirely on less-than-carlot local shipments for what freight business it handled.

Passenger traffic was more important; it accounted for more than 90 percent of gross receipts by 1920. Passenger service between Vacaville and Suisun began May 17, 1914, with four round trips daily and an eleven p.m. special every Saturday night. The ride in enclosed wooden Niles passenger cars was comfortable if not luxurious, and the convenient connections by SP rail or independent steamboat to San Francisco or points east drew passenger traffic away from the Vacaville-Elmira branch of the Southern Pacific. But both railroads found themselves fighting a losing battle with the automobile for passenger traffic, especially after the main highway between Sacramento and San Francisco was routed through Vacaville in 1912. The interurban stopped carrying passengers from Vacaville in 1926, and the SP followed suit in 1934.

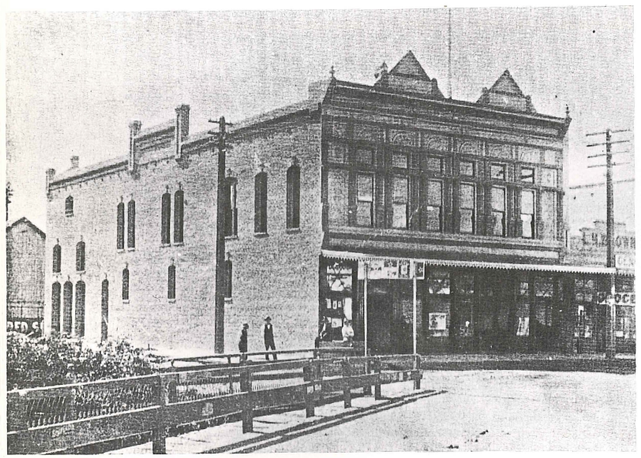
Long before travelers could no longer ride to Suisun, Vacaville's interurban underwent two important corporate changes. Outmaneuvered by the Oakland, Antioch and Eastern Railway, which completed a line between the East Bay and Sacramento in 1913, the Northern Electric canceled plans for building the Sacramento-Vallejo line—a move that left the Vacaville-Suisun section high and dry—but in spite of this retenchment, it could not survive. Bankrupt by 1914, it passed into receivership and was reorganized in 1918 as the Sacramento Northern Railroad. Three years later the Western Pacific took control, fulfilling the prophetic rumors fifteen years before.

Needing feeder lines for its transcontinental service, Western Pacific in 1929 also absorbed the San Francisco-Sacramento (formerly the Oakland, Antioch and Eastern and known after 1920 as the Sacramento Short Line) and made plans, which never materialized, to complete the old V&N to Vallejo in order to connect with the line to Napa. Two years before, Western Pacific had finally tied the Vacaville-Suisun line to Sacramento and Oakland by completing a short freight feeder to Creed. The fruit growers at last had a reasonable alternative to the SP, but by that time Vacaville's fresh fruit industry was practically defunct.

Southeast Main Street about 1910



Business Growth in the Formative Years



Before the expansion of fruit culture in the 1880s, Vacaville was only one of several small towns in Solano County where a handful of local merchants eked out a marginal living by serving the scattered ranchers of Vaca, Lagoon, and Pleasants valleys. The unincorporated hamlet along Ulatis Creek, with its 361 inhabitants and a series of small colleges, was commercially far behind its larger neighbors, Elmira and Suisun. Their positions astride the principal water and railroad routes of the county gave them prominence during the era when grain was the county's most important product. But the fruit boom, coupled with improved rail transportation and falling grain prices, radically altered the commercial status of these three rivals.

Suisun, already hurt by rail expansion into the Central Valley, which reduced the demand for Solano grain and lessened dependence on water transportation, drifted slowly toward economic stagnation. Elmira, once a flourishing rail town, practically disappeared after a series of disastrous fires ravaged its warehouses and shops. By the turn of the century it had been reduced to a scarred fragment of its former self, and its remaining merchants survived largely on the liquor traffic, especially after Vacaville went dry in 1909.

Vacaville, on the other hand, leaped ahead of its rivals as the fruit industry expanded in the optimistic eighties. By the mid-eighties the business district—which spread along both sides of Main Street as far as Depot Street to the east and past Dobbins Street to the west—

boasted two blacksmiths, two laundries, three general stores, two draymen, two cobblers, a hotel, a boarding house, two notaries public, six saloons, two painters, and almost two dozen single enterprises, including druggist, dentist, saddler, undertaker, butcher, and livery. In addition to the college, the town's cultural attributes included three church buildings serving five congregations, and seven fraternal orders. In 1884, a glowing letter to the **Pacific Rural Press** from a Central Valley resident summed up the town's progress: "During the past few years—say about five—Vacaville has changed from an old dilapidated village to a beautiful little town, looking neat and clean and full of life and energy. . . . Within ten years from this time this valley will be one of the most charming spots in the state." The forecast was perhaps naïve, but it reflected the new spark of life that had been injected into the town by the fruit boom.

Home Building

The facelift that surprised travelers in the early eighties was partly due to new construction, not only in the business district, but also in adjacent residential areas. Home building activity reached a peak in 1883, when as many as six builders were at work on a dozen or more new houses or additions. Spurred by rosy predictions that both land values and population would triple in two to five years, builders subdivided orchard land just outside the original townsite and laid out modest frame bungalows and tenement houses for expected newcomers.

Lumber for most of the new construction came from the commercial yard operated by Daniel K. Corn until 1886 and then by Frederick B. Chandler, prominent rancher and businessman who reached California by the Panama route in 1852. After mining and merchandising in Sacramento and Shasta, Chandler returned to his native New York in the late fifties, married an old sweetheart, and came back to Shasta in 1861. Successful as a livery stable proprietor, he turned to politics, serving two terms as county treasurer and tax collector. The lumber business next caught his business eye, and with his Shasta connections he was successful from the start. Opening a retail store in Elmira in 1870, he bought the Vacaville yard in 1886 and later expanded into Winters, Madison, and Esparto. With his lumber profits he bought Solano ranch land, holding over 1,400 acres on three spreads by 1903. His eldest son, Harry, ran the family lumber business in Vacaville until Diamond Match Company purchased it in 1920.

Among the town builders of the 1880s, Meredith R. Miller was perhaps the best known. A Wisconsin pioneer who drove an ox team to Oregon in the 1840s, he moved to Pleasants Valley in the next decade after securing a quarter section from the government, using land warrants he received for his participation in the Black Hawk War of 1832. In 1883 he sold his valley ranch and moved to Vacaville where he bought a square block and began construction of a cluster of tenements.

The Enterprising Millers

While M.R. Miller's crew pounded nails on Elizabeth Street, his son James M. Miller pounded pills in his apothecary shop on Main Street. Born on his father's ranch near Oakdale School in 1856, he grew up with the community, took chemistry at the local college, and became a druggist at twenty-one. Already well established when business began to accelerate in the 1880s, young Miller soon branched out into other enterprises. In 1884 he launched Vacaville's first telephone system by stringing a line, at his own expense, from his drugstore in Vacaville to Elmira, where it connected with the main trunk line of the Sunset Telephone Company between San Francisco and Sacramento. Encouraged by the local interest aroused by Miller's private line, the telephone company—a predecessor of "Ma Bell"—soon installed a switchboard in the back of the drugstore and hired Miller as local agent to solicit subscribers by offering three months free service. Miller in turn hired his sister-in-law, Katherine Saxton, the daughter of a pioneer Baptist preacher, to become the town's first operator.

As Miller remembered years later, his first customers were fruit growers who had become so dependent on the telephone during the fall rush that by spring, when their free service expired, they jumped at the chance to sign on. The next year one of his subscribers, state Senator Buck, recommended him for postmaster, and he served four years during the first Cleveland administration and four more when Cleveland won again. At heart he

Vacaville druggist J.M. Miller takes in the sun. The Reid Drug Store was Miller's major competitor. R.L. Reid, standing at left, shared the space with Trent Hewitt, jeweler, behind counter at right. Customers I.K. Buck and Ike Blum stand at center.

was a druggist, however, and he remained proprietor of the Vacaville Drug Company until he retired in 1936. A favorite town character whose derby and suspenders were local landmarks, Miller lived on into the 1950s, reminiscing to the end about the early days of Vacaville.

Like his father, Jim Miller invested in downtown real estate in the early 1880s, anticipating a rapid rise in land prices. Their optimism was well founded, for land values shot upward in a matter of months. By 1884 town lots on Main Street were selling for $1,000 to $1,500, spawning several new real estate companies, which sought to capitalize on the brisk trade. One was the Vacaville Land Agency, a partnership that handled both town lots and orchard property. Oscar Garlichs, one of the partners, arrived from Missouri in the seventies and became an established local orchardist before turning to real estate.

General Stores

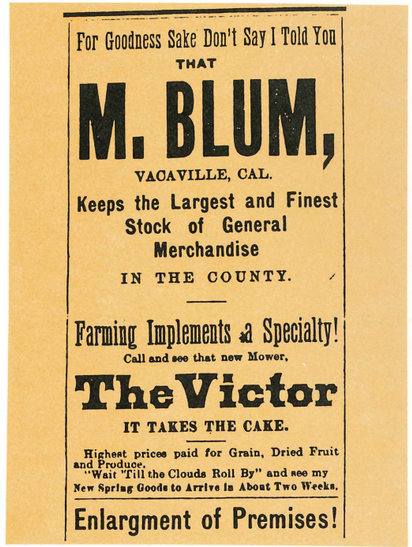
Other service industries also blossomed during the fruit boom. Among the merchants, Moses Blum was one of the oldest and most influential. A Jew from Alsace, he found his way with two

brothers to Vacaville in 1853 and opened a general store. Over the years he built his business by extending credit and loans to both cattle ranchers and fruit growers and handling their produce as well. At one time he was reported to have held as much as $50,000 of Vaca and Peña receipts from cattle, sheep, and wool sales. In 1885 he turned the mercantile business over to two of his five sons and retired to San Francisco. A younger son, Max, after attending California College, Harvard, and Hastings Law School, became a prosperous San Francisco attorney. The Vacaville firm of J. & I. Blum, in the meantime, closed out the general store in 1903 and turned all its attention to the dried fruit business.

In 1884 another general store opened with considerable newspaper fanfare and a large assortment of groceries, furniture, and dry goods. George N. Platt, David Dutton, and Daniel Corn, the three proprietors, were all oldtimers in Vacaville. Dutton had been with Peter Lassen when he came to California from Oregon in 1840. After an obscure adventure in Hawaii he returned to California during the Gold Rush. In the 1850s he ran cattle in Vaca Valley and was well known to older residents. Daniel Corn was an Ohio native who came to Gold Hill, Nevada, in 1862, made money in the mines but got caught in the speculative frenzy and, like Mark Twain, soon found himself with half a trunk full of worthless mining stock. Reaching Vacaville in 1864, he farmed at first, then opened the town's first livery stable before joining the Platt-Dutton venture. Later in the 1880s he operated a lumber yard and entered politics, serving two terms as county supervisor and another two terms as a town trustee. The third member of the firm, George N. Platt, was a good-natured New York Irishman who farmed in Vaca Valley nearly ten years before turning to business in town.

Unfortunately the general store, which began so auspiciously in 1884, was hurt by intense competition and by a business slump later in the decade. The partnership eventually dissolved. Corn went into politics, Dutton retired, and Platt shifted into real estate and insurance. By the time of his death in 1897 he had become the principal insurance agent in town. The Platt agency and the family name carried on in the hands of George's witty and resourceful twin sons, Frank and Ralph, both of whom grew up in the area and added considerably to its local color.

Harry ("Cat") Pyle and his delivery wagon



The Platt Brothers

Frank Platt, who eventually became a noted San Francisco dentist, launched his career by accident while working in a dentist's office during his school days at California College.

One day while the dentist was out a Chinese fellow in great pain mounted the dentist's chair, obviously not understanding that the boy in the white apron was not the proprietor. Not one to pass up an opportunity, Frank proceeded to operate.

Frank's brother Ralph—better known as "Riley," "Rally," or, to his most bosom buddies, "Whistling Rufus"—was unquestionably Vacaville's most colorful personality. After his father died he took over the insurance business and conducted it, in conjunction with several civic duties, until his own death in 1928 at age sixty-four. In the meantime he became a politician, winning a four-year term as justice of the peace in 1910. After being defeated in a reelection bid by Samuel D. Bristow, he ran again in 1918, defeated Bristow, and held the office until he died.

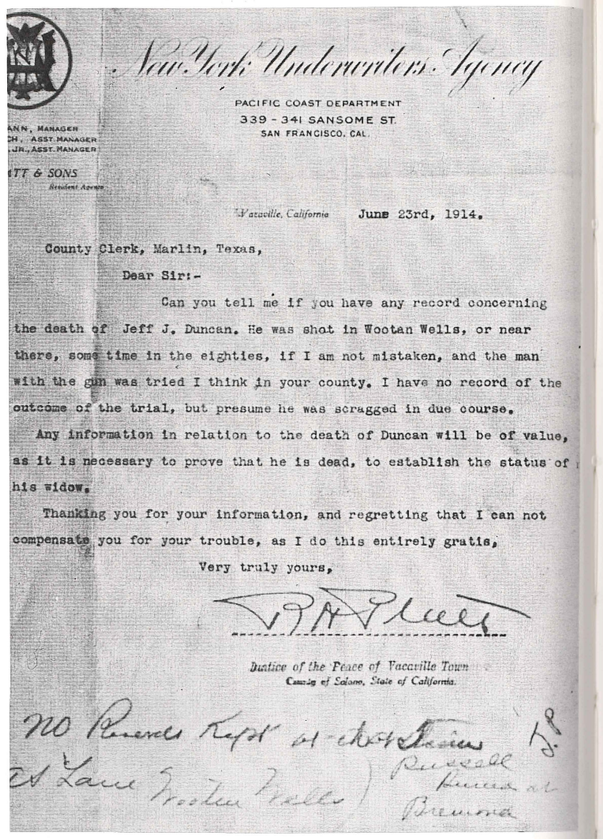
When not on the bench Ralph hunted ducks and deer with nimrod friends like Frank A. Steiger and Enos Goepfert or rode the fire engine as a member of the Vacaville volunteers. He was also town recorder for a number of years, and although he refused to join fraternal organizations (he felt they were too stuffy and ritualistic), he could always be counted on for humanitarian service in one capacity or another. In short, Judge Platt was a respected, popular, and productive member of the community.

He was also a lot of fun, as his personal correspondence with Mrs. Margaret "Daisy" MacIntyre, the daughter of Frank Steiger, reveals. Acting the role of favorite uncle, he wrote her charming letters that show him to be a man of many talents, including raconteur, satirist, poet, and philosopher. Of course, as a public figure the judge had to maintain a certain amount of decorum, but even in his official capacity he took delight in being most unorthodox. For example, in 1924 he wrote a puckish letter to the town trustees: "Gentlemen," it began, "having ruined my health in your service, for half the compensation paid an ordinary grocery clerk for half the labor, I hereby tender my resignation as town recorder, to take immediate effect."

Oldtimers in Vacaville still remember the widely distributed letter Judge Platt wrote to the Diamond Match Company in 1928 to complain about the excessive number of "duds" he found in each box. He met his match, so to speak, late one afternoon as he tried to light up after a hard day in court. Absentmindedly drawing the wooden sliver across the seat of his pants—his customary striking surface—he was unpleasantly surprised to feel a "sharp physical pang" and to "hear the fabric part at the application of the untipped splinter." Adding to his troubles was his belated discovery that the remaining matches in the box were "of like ilk," leaving him without a light, "disappointed, smokeless and exposed to the elements." Learning of this lamentable predicament, the general manager of the company wrote a polite reply and sent Platt a whole case of matches to "pass judgment on." However, there was no accompanying offer to repair the damage to the customer or his trousers.

Vacaville Bankers

Less colorful, perhaps, but financially more successful than the Platts, was George W. Crystal, an Indiana native who came to California by way of Oregon in the mid-eighties. Opening a dry goods store in 1889, he expanded rapidly by combining shrewd management and sales promotion. In less than a decade his general store was the largest in town, and he moved into banking, a natural sideline for most local merchants who provided loan and credit service to residents as a matter of course.



New York Underwriters Agency

PACIFIC COAST DEPARTMENT
339 - 341 SANSOME ST.
SAN FRANCISCO, CAL.

ANN, MANAGER
H, ASST. MANAGER
JR., ASST. MANAGER

TT & SONS
Resident Agents

Vacaville, California June 23rd, 1914.

County Clerk, Marlin, Texas,

Dear Sir:-

Can you tell me if you have any record concerning the death of Jeff J. Duncan. He was shot in Wootan Wells, or near there, some time in the eighties, if I am not mistaken, and the man with the gun was tried I think in your county. I have no record of the outcome of the trial, but presume he was scragged in due course.

Any information in relation to the death of Duncan will be of value, as it is necessary to prove that he is dead, to establish the status of his widow.

Thanking you for your information, and regretting that I can not compensate you for your trouble, as I do this entirely gratis,

Very truly yours,

J. P. Platt

Justice of the Peace of Vacaville Town
County of Solano, State of California.

No Records Kept at Court House
at Lane Wootan Wells)
Russell
Inman &
Brenna

A letter written by Ralph Platt, town justice of the peace in the 1920s as well as an insurance salesman. Platt's creative wit is indicated by the unique terminology used in this letter. In private correspondence he was both witty and reflective, as the following bit of doggerel, composed for his friend Margaret Steiger, suggests: "The Law, according to the Books, is but some simple rules,/Tho Lawyers oftentimes are crooks and some of them are fools." Platt died in 1928.

The banking business in Vacaville began formally in 1883 when William B. Parker, William B. Davis, David Dutton, and Edward R. Thurber, all prosperous orchardists or merchants, joined Reuel Drinkwater Robbins of Suisun in founding the Bank of Vacaville with a $100,000 capitalization. As the only bank in town for twenty-five years, it was popular and successful, especially among the more affluent orchardists who were the principal depositors, borrowers, and stockholders. By 1901, a "banner year" for the bank, deposits alone totaled $125,000.

Reuel Robbins, a native of Maine, arrived in California via the Isthmus of Panama in 1860, began work as a yardman for a Suisun lumber company, and soon bought out the business. A prime mover in establishing the Bank of Suisun, by the 1880s he was one of the county's most formidable business leaders. As a banker and investor he was well acquainted with both the land and the people of central and northern Solano County, and by shrewdly making the most of his position and assets, he built up an enormous estate worth millions at his death in 1919.

During Robbins' tenure as president, the Bank of Vacaville had one financial crisis in 1894 following the nationwide panic the previous year. Smaller investors, unsettled by a rumor that the bank was about to close its doors, started a two-day run during which $5,000 was paid out. But the large depositors ignored the rumor, confidently asserting that there was "not a more solid country bank in California." (Safecrackers confirmed the bank's solidarity in 1913. They tried to dynamite open the vault door but only succeeded in tipping the vault over on its face, sealing off the contents and foiling their own plot.)

The crisis passed quickly, and the bank reasserted its leadership and regained the confidence of its smaller clients even during the height of the economic depression the following year. One measure of public esteem was the praise earned for the bank's liberal policy of carrying defaulted farm mortgages on the books long after other banks might have foreclosed—a practice its successor, the Bank of America, did not follow during the greater depression of the thirties.

Robbins served as president of the Bank of Vacaville for thirty-two years, except for a brief intermission from 1906 to 1909 when Frank Buck became president after Robbins sold most of his bank stock to Vacaville investors in an effort to give the bank a local character and thwart rivals who wanted to start a "hometown" bank. In 1909 Buck resigned and Robbins was reelected. He retired for good in 1915 to be succeeded by George Crystal, who by that time had become a full-time banker. When Crystal died unexpectedly in 1917 the bank came under the leadership of Clement M. Hartley, prominent orchardist and head of the Vacaville Fruit Company.

In 1910 the Bank of Vacaville's local monopoly ended when the First National Bank of Vacaville opened its doors in temporary quarters on the ground floor of a two-story structure on the Hutton

Block. The building, otherwise known as the Triangle Building, still dominates the angle formed by the junction of Main and Merchant Streets. The First National was organized by Thomas H. Buckingham, Clarence J. Uhl, and other fruit growers and merchants who wanted more local control and capital for local investment than was offered by their competitor, and it began with a $50,000 capitalization, which was soon oversubscribed. A savings and loan section, started at the same time, offered 4 percent interest on deposit accounts. Despite the talk of its promoters, the bank was not entirely locally owned, but it absorbed a comfortable portion of local business and remained healthy until the mid-1920s.

Newspapers

There was hot competition in the Vacaville newspaper business, which was intensified and complicated by the conflicting personalities of James D. McClain, founder of the **Vacaville Reporter** in 1883, and Raleigh Barcar, whose political ambitions affected his career in journalism.

McClain had been a newsman for the **St. Helena Times** before coming to Vacaville. His new journal, the **Vacaville Reporter**, was intended to serve the growing agricultural districts of Vacaville, Elmira, and Winters, although Winters soon had a paper of its own. A Missouri Democrat with a hot temper, McClain soon became the community's most vocal booster, filling his columns with airy commercials and feature stories advertising the town and its prospects. He was also a champion of temperance and an implacable enemy of the saloon interests.

McClain's major newspaper rival, Raleigh Barcar, was a shrewd Southerner with a Yankee education who fanned the flames of their feud by representing the saloon lobby in Vacaville. After graduating from Amherst in 1878 and passing the Massachusetts bar examination, Barcar came to San Francisco only to find the city overstocked with lawyers. In 1883 he joined the faculty of Vacaville's college but soon tired of the experience and looked for bigger things. The next year he opened a law office in town and announced his candidacy for district attorney. The Democrats nominated him at the county convention in August, and a month before the election he purchased the **Vacaville Reporter** from McClain. The two events were not unrelated, for

Vacaville Reporter office, 1908

Barcar was well aware of the political advantages of newspaper publishing.

Despite the Democratic upsurge under Cleveland, Barcar could not crack the Republican stronghold at Vallejo and lost the November election. Undeterred, he was a perennial candidate thereafter for some county post or other, losing his closest race in 1896, when he was defeated for the state senate by only twelve votes.

Barcar changed the name of McClain's old newspaper to the **Judicion** after McClain tried to take it back when Barcar defaulted on his payments, and in 1886, hoping to capitalize on Barcar's apparent vulnerability, McClain founded a rival paper using his original title and masthead. Two years later still another paper, the **Vaca Valley Enterprise**, began under the aegis of two newcomers, Henry I. Fisher and Albert Sears, giving the citizens of Vacaville a choice of three weekly newspapers!

Even at the peak of the boom years Vacaville could not support all this newsprint, despite the interest drummed up by the rivals who hurled editorial bombshells at each other in the best tradition of nineteenth-century rural journalism. Barcar ended part of the rivalry in 1891 by purchasing the **Enterprise**. The next year McClain sold the **Reporter** to Charles L. Andrews, an Oakland newsman, who ingeniously hired Barcar as editor, thus bringing all three papers under the same management. Since the **Enterprise** and the **Judicion** were now superfluous, Barcar dropped them in favor of the **Reporter**.

By that time McClain had more than financial burdens, for he showed signs of acute mental illness in an unseemly row with the pastor of the Presbyterian Church over use of the building fund. The church elders, embarrassed by McClain's intemperate remarks, dropped him from the church roster, and soon after that he was confined to an asylum in Ukiah where he died in 1909 at the age of sixty-three.

As part-time editor and principal investor, Barcar practically monopolized the local newspaper field until 1901, when R.B. Stitt, who for a time in the early nineties had control of the **Reporter**, started the **Vacaville Leader**. It was still in its infancy when Barcar absorbed it a few months later. By that time, however, the town's leading newsman had given up on a political career and had turned most of his attention to his legal and real estate interests. In 1902 he sold a half interest in the paper to Clayton L. Adsit, an Oakland native who had worked on the **St. Helena Star** and the **Oakland Enquirer**. The next year Barcar turned over the remainder of his interest to Edward C. Andrews, who entered a long and happy partnership with Adsit as co-owner of the only newspaper in town, for after 1901 there were no other rivals.

Barcar died unexpectedly in 1908 at fifty-three. By that time his real estate holdings consisted of the Hutton Block, the Barcar Block across the street, and several other residences and acreages. In the Barcar Block was the town's only remaining hostelry, the Hotel Raleigh, formerly the Vaca Valley Inn before Barcar purchased the place and had it

refurbished in 1901. It was not very imposing even after the remodeling: a two-story frame structure with tiny guest rooms and no indoor plumbing—like most other accommodations in those days, public or private. It did have a dining room, however, and Barcar scored a coup in 1906 by hiring Frank Pierpont as chef. A New York native, Pierpont's stories about his adventures as a gourmet cook for British Royalty and as interpreter, hunter, and explorer in Africa were worth the price of a meal, good or bad. For a year he was the culinary king of Vacaville, but he died in 1907 of blood poisoning. In 1909 the Hotel Raleigh burned to the ground in a spectacular fire that also engulfed the steeple of the Christian Church across the street. For eleven years thereafter Vacaville had no public accommodations.

Optimism and Competition

Like the merchants who followed the mining camps across the Mother Lode during the Gold Rush, businessmen came to Vacaville to mine the green gold brought to town by immigrant farmers and orchardists. Business competition was fierce during the height of the fruit boom. As we have seen, in the service industries, rival merchants opened stores and shops in a burst of enthusiasm and unsullied confidence in Vacaville's future. By the late 1880s and early nineties a good number of these imprudent ventures had folded. Those that survived were either the wealthiest, the most aggressive, or the oldest establishments.

Farmer and merchant alike were speculators at heart during the boom years, for both had an abiding faith in the town's future. Even the economic upheavals of the 1890s failed to dampen the spirits of the optimists, for there was still money to be made either in the fruit business or in some other venture. Indeed, between 1900 and 1902 oil speculators organized the Vacaville Oil Company, raised over $100,000 in local capital, and drilled a 1,400 foot exploratory well on the Pinkham Ranch just east of Alamo School before giving up in disgust. Oil talk continued for decades, and even as late as 1948 test borings were made in the English Hills with the aid of local financing. But Vacaville's real riches lay elsewhere—in the soil, climate, and location. The first two attracted the fruit growers and those who served them. After World War II location began to play a major role in community growth; the result was a commuter boom that far outdistanced the fruit boom seventy years before.

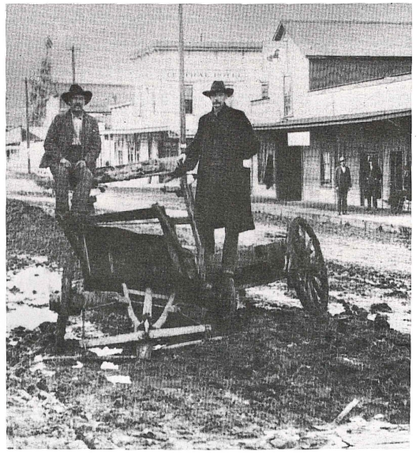
Incorporation and Public Services

Vacaville's economic growth in the 1880s led inevitably to the development of local government, for as the town grew so did the concern for management, protection, and planning. As a miniscule village in a land of ranchos and grain fields, Vacaville had little use for sewer systems, water companies, and fire departments, although its residents suffered the constant risk of disease and fire. The fruit boom, however, and the subsequent expansion of population and business transformed the community and focused attention on problems that could only be resolved by expanding public services, which in turn meant incorporating the town, establishing a board of trustees, and collecting tax revenues to meet community needs. As early as 1884 town visionaries began to agitate for incorporation, but they were far ahead of their time. It took almost a decade of annoying community problems and a series of natural and man-made disasters before residents were sufficiently aroused to incorporate as the essential first step toward making Vacaville a safe and decent place to live.

South Main Street, looking west, about 1910

Roads and Sidewalks

The residents of Vacaville had plenty to complain about in the 1880s. One of the most irritating problems was the poor condition of streets and sidewalks. Virtually nothing had been done to the town's traffic arteries since the initial townsite was laid out in the 1850s. Main Street was unsightly as well as dangerous because of potholes and obstacles hidden in the mud or dust, depending on the time of year. Constantly churned by hooves and narrow wagon wheels, the surface resembled a sirupy hog wallow in winter and a tawny river of dust in summer. Newcomers, who could still joke about such things, talked of coming to town by the "lower road," meaning the hard foundation beneath the "muck and slush," which varied from three inches to a foot deep.



The muddy streets of downtown Vacaville plagued merchants and travelers alike until asphalt finally arrived in 1914. Potholes literally destroyed wagons like the one abandoned on Main Street in the 1890s. The tall man at right is Joseph Stadtfeld.

Ladies were especially susceptible to road hazards, and if female predicaments in the Victorian era did not exist in fact, they were probably invented, particularly if recognized gentlemen were nearby. One such gentleman was Joseph Stadtfeld, a handsome young giant over six feet five inches tall who had sparred with "Gentleman Jim" Corbett and whose booming baritone enriched the town's musical performances. One day in 1885, as he neared town he found two distressed damsels in a one-horse buggy stuck in the middle of a huge mudhole. Gallantly he waded in, grabbed the bridle, flexed his muscles and pulled "horse, buggy and passengers out on dry land." Later this "Samson of Vacaville," as he was embarrassingly dubbed, ran for town constable, easily defeated his opponents, and held office for over thirty years.

Country roads were nearly as bad as those in town, although the traffic was not so concentrated, and travelers could occasionally find stretches of reasonably hard surface. While perhaps more passable in summer than during the heaviest rainy season, they were scarcely more tolerable, as exasperated travelers could testify after suffocating through clouds of dust that left a thick brown layer on everything within hundreds of feet of the roadway. As an accidental pesticide for thousands of nearby fruit trees, the grimy dust had some redeeming features, but only the most imperturbable farmers appreciated the fortuity. The rest probably preferred sulfur, which was much more controllable although it may not have been less hazardous to health.

Ancillary to the roads, and just as irritating, were the town's boardwalks. Wooden sidewalks evidently were unknown in Vacaville much before 1884, and those that were laid during the 1880s soon deteriorated because of the unexpected animal traffic. Runaways sometimes stomped over the planks, leaving gaping holes that the businessmen who had built the walks, as a trade inducement, were slow to repair. Occasionally inconsiderate drovers contributed to the damage by herding cattle and horses over the sidewalks rather than face the grasping mud—much to the ire, obviously, of the town merchants. Sidewalk hazards were a public nuisance, as James D. McClain growled in an 1884 editorial:

> Many of the so-called side-walks in Vacaville are very dangerous and many are the twists and wrenchings pedestrians receive while passing over some of them. On Saturday night last, Mrs. A. Garrison while passing down Merchant Street, had one of her feet thrown completely out of joint by stepping into a hole.

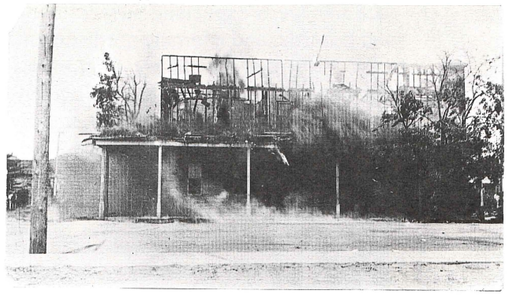
Such literal pitfalls were commonplace in an age when society placed a higher value on individual responsibility than on public welfare. But broken sidewalks and muddy roads, if sufficiently hazardous and, more important, if detrimental to economic growth, could arouse even the most complacent community. By the late 1880s, as more people wrenched their ankles, fell into potholes, mired down in mud, wrecked their wagons on rickety wooden bridges, or traded in other towns where merchants were more considerate,

Vacaville residents were beginning to pay more attention to community needs. Fire danger however, outweighed all other community problems and did the most to precipitate incorporation.

Fire Danger

Wooden towns like Vacaville in the 1880s were literal tinder boxes that could ignite, and often did, at the drop of a match. Without pressurized hydrants or effective equipment and depending largely on hand power for transportation and pumping, volunteer fire fighters put up a courageous but usually hopeless battle against impossible odds. Fires that today could be confined to a single room or extinguished in a few minutes swept almost unchecked through nineteenth-century villages, erasing entire residential or business districts. Every town, large or small, lived in constant fear of total destruction, especially if a fire broke out on a windy day.

Throughout the country dozens of towns were wiped out every year; many were rebuilt on the same grounds with the same types of building materials and faced the same fate if fire again visited the town, which it almost invariably did. It was not unusual for a town to rebuild —as San Francisco and Vacaville did— three or four times if it still had a spark of life after repeated conflagrations, or to give up—as Elmira did—after the second or third burning. The threat of total holocaust declined only after stone, concrete, and brick replaced wood as the primary building material, and technology improved fire-fighting equipment.



Raleigh Barcar's hotel going up in flames, 1909. Note the hose cart in front.

The 1888 Fires. Vacaville's drive for better fire protection began in the early eighties after two major fires nearly destroyed the town. Campaigning to improve the town's fire-fighting apparatus, which consisted of a single water well and a short length of hose operated by a handful of "cooks and housewives," newsman McClain urged local residents to either purchase more hose or buy a hand pumper. He repeated that plea in November 1883, after a huge fire reduced Dixon to ashes, but improvements were agonizingly slow. By the late eighties the town had more volunteers and a few hand extinguishers, but their inadequacies became painfully apparent in 1888, when Vacaville suffered two major fires. One in August destroyed a number of Chinese dwellings and another in November ruined the business district.

The August fire, touched off by the explosion of a kerosene lamp which a woman had unfortunately tried to fill near another lighted lantern, occurred on part of the W.J. Dobbins' property southwest of his imposing home on Ulatis Creek.

To accommodate his Chinese labor crews, Dr. Dobbins had constructed a series of small frame cabins across the dirt road from his orchards, which covered hundreds of acres north of what is now Montevista Avenue. Other orchardists also built labor quarters nearby, and a few Chinese merchants were attracted by the Oriental concentration. By the mid-eighties a small but growing Oriental district had been established in the section bordered by Ulatis Creek, Kendall Street, Dobbins Street, and the Dobbins orchard.

Conveniently isolated from white residential and commercial districts, the area was still close enough to serve as a labor and mercantile center for both Oriental and white. Indeed, it seemed much too close when the August fire began, for the flames singed white businesses and fanned racial animosities. "The Chinese quarters are always a menace to any town," snarled the newspaper editor, "and they should be far removed from important centers." Despite the caveat, property owners rebuilt on the same sites as soon as they could clear away the rubble. Unfortunately the new structures were just as cheap and inflammable as the shanties they replaced, and the district remained a firetrap throughout its existence.

Even more destructive was the November fire which began in Daniel Corn's livery stable just after midnight on election day. Allegedly started by a mysterious arsonist while officials were still counting ballots for Cleveland and Harrison, the fire spread quickly and was already eating away huge chunks of the mercantile area on Main Street when the volunteers arrived. By that time flames were leaping high enough to be seen in Sacramento and were impossible to put out with the equipment at hand. The fire burned itself out the next day, leaving behind only smoking ruins of what had once been the bank, the Davis Hotel, the Masonic Hall, the Odd Fellows, and many general stores and shops.

Except for the 1877 fire, it was Vacaville's most serious fire up to that time, but merchants were undiscouraged. Relying more on credit and faith than on insurance returns, which were meager in those days, they rebuilt, some crossing to the south side of Main Street and converting to brick. They tried in vain to widen the street, but they did succeed in lengthening it to intersect with the county road coming up from the southwest, which was already known as Merchant Street. When a lane was cut from the west end of Main Street through the Buck

orchards in 1889, the business district became easily accessible from every sector of the community. As both commercial and fire prevention measures these improvements were significant, for Main Street, especially the south side, became the commercial center of town, and no major fire ever again visited the south side between Davis and Elizabeth.

Deterioration of Burned Areas. In contrast, the area north of Main deteriorated. Abandoned by the more affluent merchants and lodges, it became the town's first slum, with a motley collection of cheap frame buildings rising from the ashes of the August and November fires. Significantly, in the words of the local newspaper editor, the "first building erected on the burned district was Ream's saloon, a rough board affair."

Although the stores fronting Main Street gradually evolved into more imposing structures, the district never quite recovered its former commercial and social stature. Saloonkeepers began to concentrate along the north side of the street, partly to escape the wrath of starchy ladies who were less likely to descend on a blighted area, and partly to take advantage of the cheaper property values caused by the proximity of the Oriental district in the rear. Before the century ended a somewhat sleazy pattern of north side urban development was well established, and it continued unchanged until World War II.

The 1890 Fires. The 1888 torments were not the last ones to visit Vacaville, for two years later two additional fires, one in late August and the second two weeks later, reduced to rubble much of the new construction that had begun to erase the earlier scars on the north side. Little had been done since 1888 to improve the fire-fighting capacity of the town, and the most effective antidote was "Uncle Billy Butcher," one of the local oldtimers who "was on hand with his Babcock Extinguishers, and rendered efficient service."

In the spring of 1890 S.C. Walker and other businessmen had been disturbed by rumors that fire insurance companies were about to raise rates from 50 to 200 percent on commercial buildings in country towns not well supplied with water. They had organized the Vacaville Water Company, constructed a reservoir, and made plans to lay a six-inch water main through town. But the directors were still trying to raise capital through stock sales when the first fire began. Eight commercial buildings fell victim to the flames, with losses totaling over $25,000—not an insignificant sum in 1890 dollars.

Aroused at last, Vacaville residents held a mass meeting September 15 and organized the town's first volunteer hose company, electing W.C. Donoho as its first president. Eager new members immediately launched a fund-raising drive, but contributions were disappointing. Enough money was raised to purchase a used hose cart from San Francisco and a monstrous 700-pound bell that had gone through a courthouse fire at Napa, but clearly the company needed mandatory support in the form of tax revenues,

and that meant organizing a town government. It was time to face the inevitable incorporation.

Opposition to Incorporation

Two independent centers of opposition crystallized as incorporation became a major topic of conversation in the late 1880s. The saloon proprietors feared the consequences of town government on liquor licenses and regulatory ordinances. More important, the large orchardists whose property bordered the townsite feared the increased property taxes that town organization would inevitably impose. W.J. Dobbins, the most implacable foe of incorporation, fought vigorously to defeat the incorporation petitions that began to circulate in the late eighties.

At a town meeting late in 1889 the opponents stood their ground against advocates of organization to fight fires, build sewers, improve streets and sidewalks, abate nuisances, erect public buildings, and establish a school system. All this would be done at public expense, noted the wealthier landlords who would have to bear the major tax burden. Led by Dobbins, Senator Parker, and William H. Hill, the critics dominated the meeting and prevented any further action, although most of the same landholders went on record in favor of a water works, which helped stimulate the development of the Vacaville Water Company the next year.

Complicating the incorporation issue were peripheral appeals of town promoters and reformers, who demanded laws against Chinese washhouses and cruelty to animals or wanted a reading room and a picket fence for the public school. To many potential taxpayers in a laissez faire age, such things were either expensive frills or personal impositions. What right, for instance, did a town have to determine how long a harnessed horse should be hitched to a post without water? Incorporation advocates were further hindered by a published letter from an unnamed correspondent late in 1889. The writer argued that Suisun's 1883 incorporation had cost taxpayers $16,000 with almost nothing in return. A fire company was established, said the author, but the hoses rotted on the fire engine and were useless when a fire destroyed the town in 1888. The lesson seemed clear: incorporation was more likely to be a waste of money than an urban panacea.

Undaunted by criticism, incorporation proponents brought the issue before town voters early in January 1891 and carried the field by a narrow margin, seventy-nine to fifty-six. It was a short-lived victory, however, for the county board of supervisors threw out the returns because of numerous errors and ballot irregularities.

Before a new election could be held, opponents counterattacked by launching a campaign to incorporate the entire township rather than the town itself. Arguing that by broadening the tax base the same ends could be achieved with less burden on the individual taxpayer, the township advocates did more to confuse the issue than resolve it. Perhaps

it was a deliberate red herring as their detractors charged. At any rate the county board, when asked to hear the case in the spring of 1891, found their Fairfield chambers packed with as many opponents as proponents, and, being good politicians, they naturally took no action. At the next meeting, facing the same situation, they again postponed further deliberation, this time indefinitely. Since they had also failed to call for a new election on the question of town incorporation, the result was a stalemate.

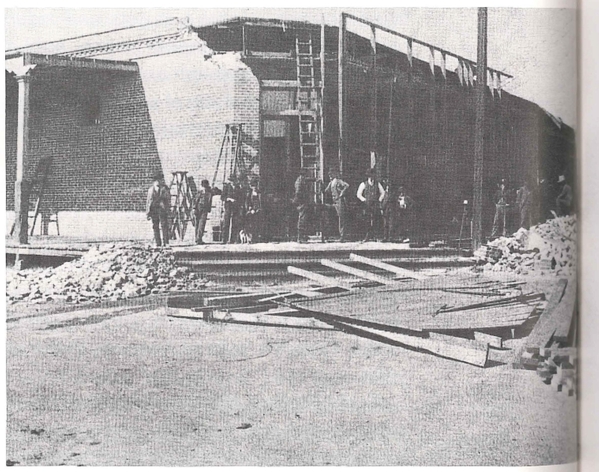
Water and Power

In the meantime the water company completed its reservoir and water main, temporarily reinforcing the arguments of those who believed that incorporation was not necessary for town progress. By June 1891 water flowed from pressurized hydrants for the first time, and a joyous editorial predicted a marvelous transformation—the monotonous brown lots would be relieved by plots of blue grass or alfalfa, readers were assured, which incidentally would "afford grazing for a flock of chickens with many relishable browsings for an animal."

Flushed with the triumph of their water company, the directors, led by F. H. Hacke and Frank Buck, moved into the electric power business. Early in 1892 a reorganized Vacaville Water and Light Company purchased a 30-horsepower steam engine, a steel boiler, and two generators, and began installation of poles and wires to provide over 300 lights for businesses and residences along Main Street and other major arteries. On April 9, 1892, Superintendent T.B. Martin threw the main switch at the power plant to the accompaniment of all the bells in town. An instant success, the company soon had 100 new orders to fill and expected to reach the limit of its capacity within the year.

Disaster Lends a Hand

The lights suddenly went out ten days later at 3 a.m. in a disaster no one had foreseen. The largest earthquake ever to hit the town shook down the poles and wires; tossed the brick fronts of the buildings out into the middle of Main Street; burst the redwood water pipes; shifted the Ulatis Creek bridge three feet; spouted a spring on Captain Chinn's ranch; started a clock that had stopped three years before; collapsed chimneys all over the township; overturned tables, chairs, lamps, and other furniture; and



tumbled scores of shocked citizens out of their beds. Miraculously no one was killed, but injuries were numerous and property damage totaled well over $100,000.

With one mighty roar nature had destroyed all the town improvements, and now there was no turning back the incorporation bandwagon. County supervisors, calling for an election in July, gave local voters the chance to speak out again. They did, using the secret ballot for the first time, and approved incorporation by an overwhelming margin, 111 to 25. They also elected five trustees, a treasurer, a clerk, and a marshal. Vacaville was no longer a village.

Beginning to Solve the Problems: Taxes First

Raising revenue was first on the agenda when the board of trustees, led by President Frank H. Buck, got down to business in the summer of 1892. By September they had drafted a licensing ordinance, which established quarterly fees for almost every conceivable type of activity or occupation. With ten dollars per quarter from the bank, two dollars from each pool hall, twenty-five dollars apiece from the saloons, and other collections accordingly, the town coffers grew full enough to undertake long-awaited improvements.

Streets and Sidewalks. Main Street was paved first, with redwood sewer pipes replacing open trenches and tons of macadam topping the dust and mud. Nor were the sidewalks neglected. In lieu of street assessments, Main Street property owners themselves financed the construction of concrete sidewalks to replace rickety planks. By the mid-nineties both sidewalks and macadam had been completed. According to the **Reporter** editor—whose enthusiasm is understandable considering previous conditions—Main Street now had the "appearance of a Parisian Boulevard."

Despite their former complaints, not all farmers welcomed the new macadam, which was little more than loose gravel graded and sloped to improve drainage. Horses now had to be shod to withstand the sharp pebbles, and the farmers were pressed to convert to wide-tired wagon wheels that did less damage to the roadway. Even hitching posts had to be removed from Main Street to prevent standing horses from churning holes in the macadam. All this was both costly and inconvenient to outlying orchardists who traded in town, and they continued grousing until autos replaced horses and Main Street was finally paved in 1914.

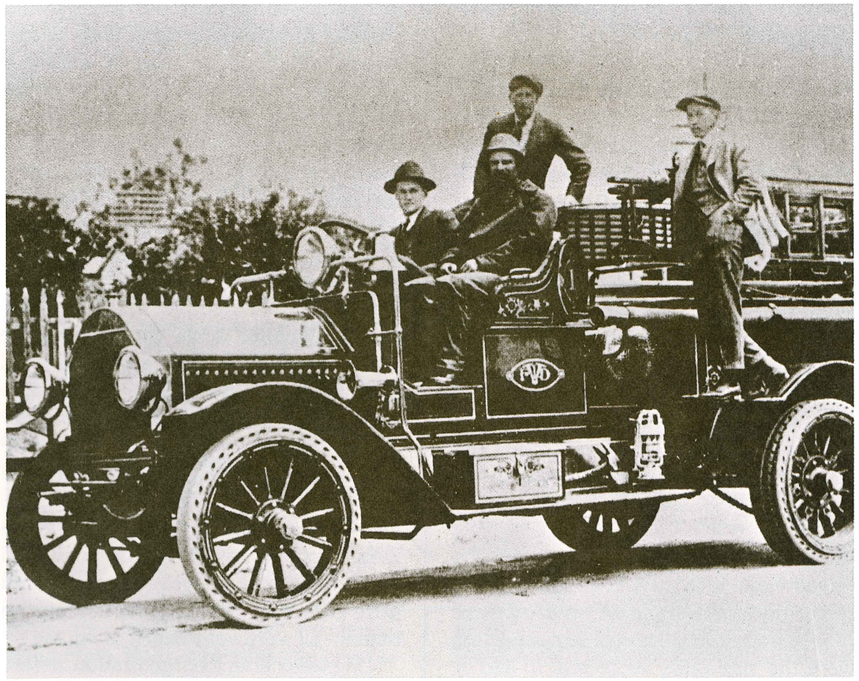
Fire Protection. While the street work was just getting a good start, the trustees turned to the other key problem: fire protection. In 1895 after considerable deliberation, they disbanded the hose company and created the town's first fire department, complete with chief engineer and uniforms for its twenty-five men. Actually most of the men and equipment were carryovers from the old hose company days and the pay was no better—all were volunteers, of course.

One week after its organization, before

the men had even had a chance to drill, the new department faced its first big test. On September 8 a fire of unknown origin erupted near midnight in the Central Hotel on the corner of Main and Bernard Streets. In two hours nearly all the buildings on the north side between Dobbins and the Main Street bridge were swept away—for the third time in seven years. Among the ruins were the Bowles Opera House, which finally got adequate heat and light, and over fifty shanties in the Chinese district.

The firemen performed admirably, staying on the lines for hours and saving a number of buildings, but their equipment was limited and continued to be for years. They were still using a single hand cart as late as 1909, when the Hotel Raleigh burned, and things had not improved much by 1913, when a major fire destroyed three buildings in the growing Japanese district. But the 1895 blaze was the last to sweep through whole sections of town. Better organization, updated equipment, the increasing use of brick

Vacaville's first fire truck, 1916



and concrete as building materials, fire codes for better prevention, and, most important, improvements in water delivery and the expanded use of pressurized fire hydrants—all these spelled the difference between fire containment and utter destruction. By 1916, when the trustees completely reorganized the volunteers into an efficient thirty-man unit and purchased the town's first self-propelled fire engine, Vacaville could boast one of the most modern departments in the county.

Water and Power. Effective fire fighting depended on a good water supply, and the Vacaville Water and Light Company tried to keep pace with local needs. The expense of rebuilding both water and light delivery systems after the earthquake drained the resources of the local owners, and it soon became apparent that outside capital was essential. By 1900 company officials could not keep up with the growing local demand, and residents began to complain about the private utility monopoly, which rendered poor service at high prices. Even the water quality seemed to have declined, although one defender said the public had to expect a certain amount of minerals, organisms, and "accidents."

The Yuba Electric Power Company, in conjunction with the Bay Counties Power Company—both predecessors of Pacific Gas and Electric—had begun building feeder lines from power plants on the Yuba River to the urban centers in the Bay Area and other parts of northern California. It was only a matter of time before the giant companies swept up the smaller as consolidation accompanied expansion of delivery systems and services. Early in 1902 a group of regional investors with a franchise from Bay Counties Power Company purchased controlling interest in Vacaville Water and Light. Under the new management, the local subsidiary was tied into northern California's expanding power network by the end of the year with a feeder line from Vacaville to Elmira, which hooked into the main line from the Yuba River to the Bay Area.

Service improved and rates dropped overnight, leading to a rapid conversion from steam and gasoline to electricity as a source of local industrial power. The **Reporter** office threw out its gasoline engine before the end of the year, and Chandler's lumber mill soon began installing electric planers and other machinery. With 40,000 volts coming in from the Yuba, the town had, for the moment, an abundance of cheap power.

Ironically, less than six months after the Yuba lines reached Vacaville, another potential cheap energy source was discovered just five miles away at Vanden Station, where the Rochester Oil Company located its first commercial natural gas well. Although the company promised to pipe gas to Vacaville in the near future, by the time it arrived electricity was the unsurpassed power king of the community.

Solving the town's water problems was not as easy, for as local population and commerce increased, so did the demands on Vacaville Water and Light's small reservoir and water main. Most of the

company water was pumped from a well in Frank Buck's orchard west of Main Street. New wells were sunk, but by 1903 water demands had reached 135,000 gallons per day, and supplying those demands was almost impossible with the never generous groundwater supply in Vaca Valley.

Dry years brought water shortages in the late summer months, turning verdant lawns brown and leaving many patrons without tap water. Although company officials urged conservation in short years, water rationing, priorities, or penalties for overuse were evidently not considered. Fortunately no major fires erupted during periods of acute shortage, for the fire department drew its water from the same main as domestic users. When the water pressure dropped the whole town suffered. Eventually P.G.&E. bought out the water company and dug new wells to relieve the problem.

Sewage Treatment. The need for domestic water increased as the town sewer system expanded. Redwood sewer lines, buried along with the water mains in the mud of Main Street, terminated at Vacaville's great open sewer, Ulatis Creek. By the turn of the century the sight and stench could sicken even the most unflappable resident, and community leaders demanded action.

To develop plans for a sewer system the trustees turned to the county surveyor, Frank A. Steiger, a San Francisco native who had been raised on a Vacaville ranch. After attending the local college, Steiger went on to the University of

Frank A. Steiger (1864–1944), city and county engineer for many years

Michigan's engineering school, worked a few years in Denver and Chicago, and returned to Solano County as a specialist in roads and bridges. After serving as city engineer for Vacaville, Rio Vista, and Benicia, he was elected county surveyor in 1898. Later his name would appear on almost every public concrete structure, bridge, and sewage plant in the county, for he served Solano for over half a century in one engineering capacity or another. No job, big or small, was beyond his ken, and when the Vacaville town trustees asked for help in 1899, he drew up a comprehensive plan for a sewer treatment system, complete to the last detail.

Now the town had a plan, but it took nearly a decade to implement it. Money problems held up the first proposal, which Steiger originally estimated would cost $18,000. The price had risen to $30,000 by the time a bond issue went to the voters in 1901, and they rejected it in a light turnout.

Three years later the trustees tried again, this time combining a sewer system bond issue of $25,000 with a

$40,000 plan to take over the water and light company. Steiger's revised plan called for the construction of a new power plant using gasoline engines to turn the turbines and pumps. To avoid tearing up the macadam on Main Street, the sewer main would be laid in the back alleys and connected either to a septic tank or a sewer farm outside town.

Combining two different utility packages proved to be a mistake, as the public hearings demonstrated. Most voters accepted the need for a sewer system and even bought the rationale for town takeover and expansion of the water plant that would help flush the drains, but going into the electricity business seemed a needless—and socialistic—public boondoggle. At the December election the sewer bonds, needing a two-thirds majority to carry, lost by 134 to 91, while the water and light bonds fell flat by almost the reverse numbers.

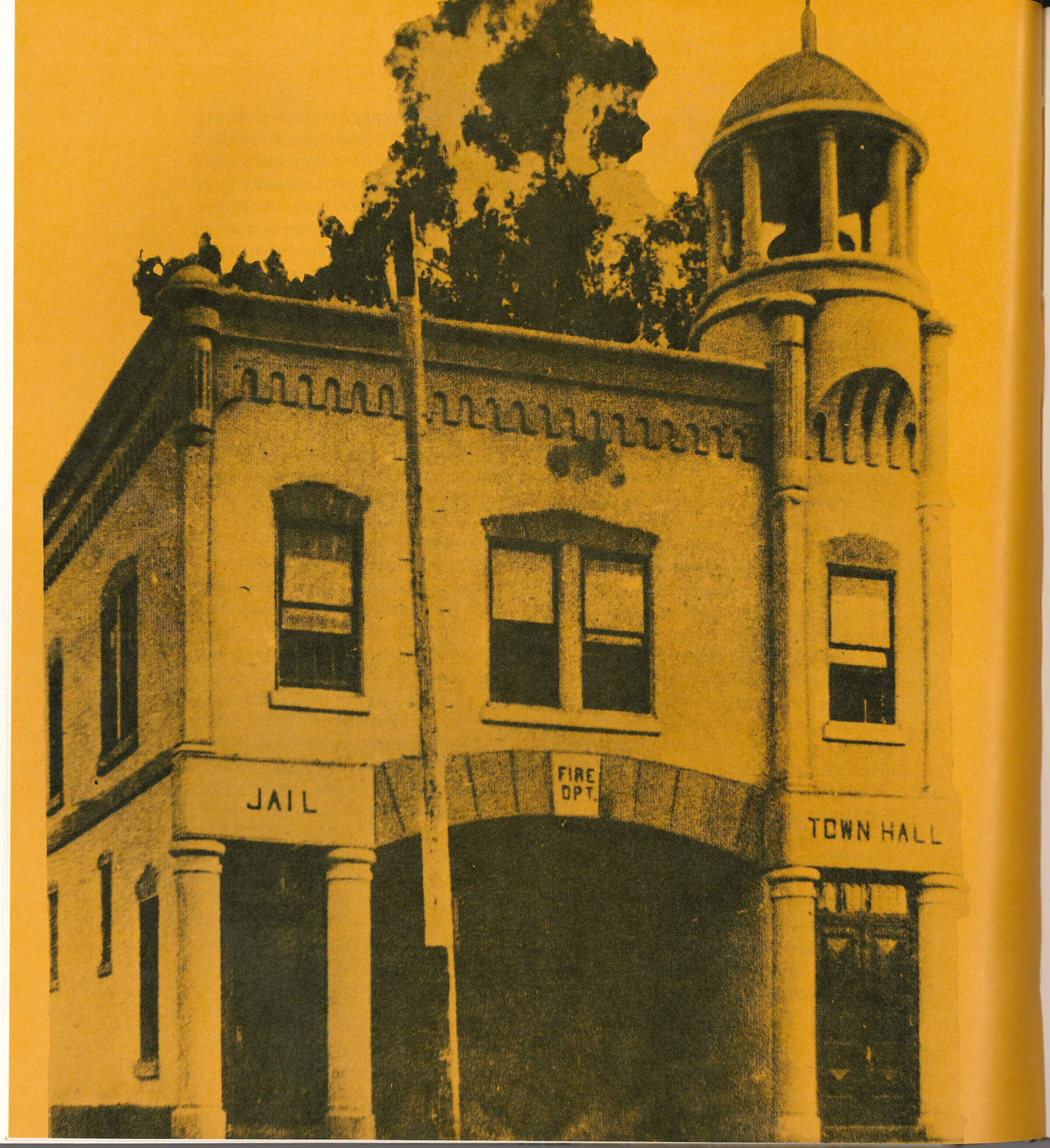
Early in 1906, determined to avoid past mistakes, the trustees told Steiger to come up with a simpler package emphasizing maximum service at minimum cost. In a few days he was back with a bare bones sewer plan. Residents could install water closets, he assured the trustees, for as little as forty dollars, complete with hookup to the main.

To accelerate the new drive, Dr. H. P. Palmer, town health officer, warned of the increasing dangers of typhoid fever and other diseases if the system were further delayed. The water company promised free flushes for five years and a nominal fee thereafter. Leading citizens published endorsements and personally campaigned, in some cases door to door.

By February the issue was no longer in doubt, and the $25,000 sewer bonds passed by a four-to-one margin. Next year the town purchased thirty-two acres from O.H. Allison for a sewage farm, and the system was built. Four years later, financed by another bond issue which passed without difficulty, five concrete septic tanks were installed on the farm, increasing the capacity of the system and reducing the odor that had brought numerous complaints from nearby Brown's Valley residents.

Official Buildings. Passage of the sewer bonds in 1906 was a major event, but completion of a town hall and jail the next year was the most visible sign of the town's progress before World War I. Soon after incorporation in 1892, talk had begun of constructing an appropriate building for town business, but, as Supervisor Daniel Corn said somewhat maliciously in 1894, the county was too poor to provide much financial aid, and "Vacaville had as good a jail as it deserved." Moreover, "he would bet $100 that if put to a vote the people of Vacaville would vote against the improvement."

Faced with disparaging remarks and with other priorities, town trustees put off further plans until 1906, when the old wooden jail was destroyed by unknown forces. The puny structure had been erected as a drunk tank on the north bank of Ulatis Creek in 1883 and had become a considerable embarrassment to the town by 1900. With tongue in cheek, Police Chief Bentley, who investi-



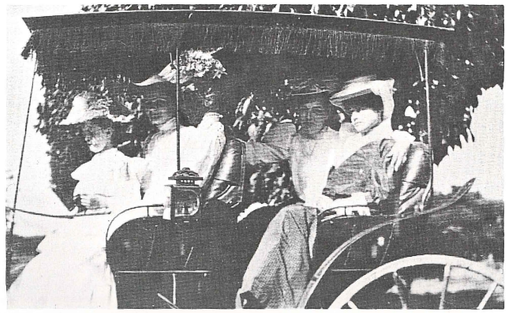
gated the case, reported that the building had either been demolished by vandals or by a high wind that mysteriously swept in from the East, did its work, and blew out of town without further damage. Most residents bid good riddance to the shack, and town and county officials took quick action on a new proposal.

Under a mutual agreement whereby the town provided a lot and $1,500 and the county chipped in $3,500, the trustees called for bids late in 1906. The contract went to Francis M. Gray, a private builder who settled in Vacaville in 1857 after driving an ox team across the plains. Gray stuck doggedly to the contract specifications laid out by City Engineer Steiger, which called for a two-story steel and concrete structure using wood only for doors, sills, and ornaments.

The lower floor, housing the fire department and jail, consisted of a large room in front for hose carts, a middle room with two steel cells, and a drunk tank in the rear. The second floor contained two offices for the justice of the peace and the city clerk and a larger chamber for the trustees. Although indoor plumbing and electricity were included in the original plans, contractor Gray had difficulty adding these features to a building with concrete floors, walls, and ceilings, but he solved the problem by pouring the cement first, and drilling holes for pipe and wiring after it hardened.

Graced on its top with a Moorish tower and a fire bell, the town's first multipurpose civic building was turned over to the trustees on July 20, 1907. Seventy years later, retired from city service, badly run down, but still structurally sound, it stands in a lonely but picturesque setting on East Main Street across from Andrews Park.

Growth of Vacaville Society



Because of its economic and social importance during the fresh fruit era and its total transformation since World War II, Vacaville serves as an excellent case study of small town growth and change. At the height of the late nineteenth-century boom days it was a thriving but close-knit community with a well-defined class and social structure. A few influential fruit farmers and businessmen, some wealthy and most of British descent, dominated the community's economic and social order and largely determined the nature of its political and cultural outlook. Following their lead were the rest of the whites of European descent. At the bottom of the social heap were the Orientals, who blended less easily into the social matrix and retained more distinctive elements of their own heritage longer than did European immigrants. Aside from the Japanese, who controlled the labor market and a large share of local trade between 1906 and the twenties, the Orientals had little impact on the economic or cultural norms of the dominant Anglo society.

Politics

These social patterns were reflected in almost every aspect of Vacaville life during the fruit boom days. Politically the town followed the lead of its prominent Southern pioneers and continued to vote Democratic until 1914 even though the Republicans regularly carried the county. Even Hiram Johnson, who visited Vacaville twice during his vigorous antirailroad campaign of 1910, failed to carry the town. Of course it must be remembered that his Democratic opponent, Theodore Bell, a well-known Napa attorney, also campaigned on an antirailroad ticket.

Between the Civil War and Johnson's sweep in 1914, the only time a Democratic gubernatorial candidate lost Vacaville was in 1894 during the Populist upsurge. Jonathan V. Webster, the Populist candidate, took enough votes away from James H. Budd to put Vacaville in the Republican column that year. But the combined Democratic and Populist vote represented nearly 56 percent of the total votes cast by the town.

In other races Vacaville was not quite so consistent, but favorite sons who were not party mavericks could almost always count on overwhelming local support. In 1882 Leonard W. Buck's 178 Vacaville votes were enough to elect him to the state senate. He did not seek reelection in 1884, but that same year another local Democrat, William B. Parker, was elected to fill a joint Yolo-Solano seat. Other local Democrats were not so lucky in state races, because the county was overwhelmingly Republican. For example, the first successful local candidate for the state assembly was J.M. Bassford, Jr., who won his seat in 1894 on the Republican ticket.

The most interesting assembly campaign involving local candidates occurred in 1912, when Clarence J. Uhl challenged one of the town's leading Democrats, Wiley S. Killingsworth. Born on his father's South Carolina cotton plantation in 1861, Killingsworth grew up during the tumultuous years of Civil War and Reconstruction. Losing his plantation, but not the political and military traditions of the Southern aristocracy, young Killingsworth studied to be a dentist after his family moved to Atlanta, but for unexplained reasons of health he entered the business world instead in the 1880s. As a buyer for Stewart and Company, a large wholesale fruit brokerage in Baltimore, he learned the fruit business and became familiar with all the

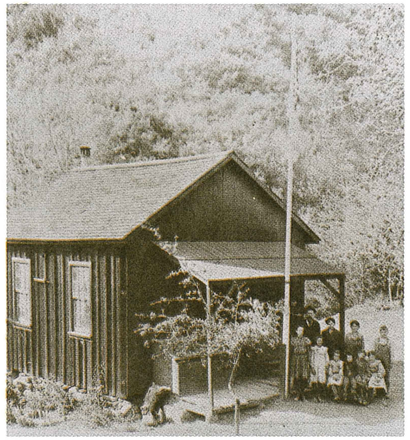
State Assemblyman Wiley S. Killingsworth

major shippers and areas of production, including those in California, which he visited on several trips west.

During a buying trip to Spain, Killingsworth became embroiled in an international incident that almost cost him his life. Just before American intervention in the guerilla war in Cuba, Spain cracked down on gunrunners to her island colony. Killingsworth was suspected because the ship his company had chartered to haul fruit to Baltimore had been involved in previous filibustering expeditions to Cuba. His hotel in Madrid was surrounded by loyalists demanding his blood, but he took refuge with the American consul and escaped after frantically wiring Stewart and Company to charter another vessel.

In May 1898 Killingsworth came to Vacaville as branch manager for the Earl Fruit Company. Age, health, and business interests kept him from joining the war against Spain, which had begun just two weeks before, but his well-known Spanish misadventure put him in the local limelight and helped launch his political career. Despite the Republican dominance of the county, he was elected to the state assembly in 1902. Two years later, instead of running for reelection, he joined the staff of Governor Pardee as aide-de-camp and lieutenant colonel in the California National Guard. In the latter post he was instrumental in securing a National Guard unit for Vacaville in 1904. In the meantime he maintained his Vacaville residence and his fruit connections, and by the 1912 campaign he was so prominent that leading Democrats in the district urged him to run for Congress. That offer he declined, deciding instead to seek the less important but "safer" seat he had once held in the assembly.

When he first entered the 1912 campaign Killingsworth seemed a shoo-in, for the Republican contender, Walter S. Thompson, was an obscure Vallejo dentist. However, six weeks before the election a surprise candidate and an unexpected issue entered the race. Backed by the Anti-Saloon League, which feared an attempt would be made to attack California's recently enacted local option law, C. J. Uhl threw his hat in the ring as an Independent. Well-known for his temperance views as well as his local orchard interests, Uhl charged somewhat intemperately that both Killingsworth and Thompson were backed by the liquor lobby in a last-ditch effort to keep California wet. The temperance movement was strong in Vacaville, but Uhl's eleventh hour candidacy failed miserably. While the local returns gave him sixty-four more votes than Killingsworth, he received only 25 percent of the county vote and ran a poor third behind the regular party contenders. Killingsworth won easily, and for good measure filed a $30,000 libel suit against Uhl.

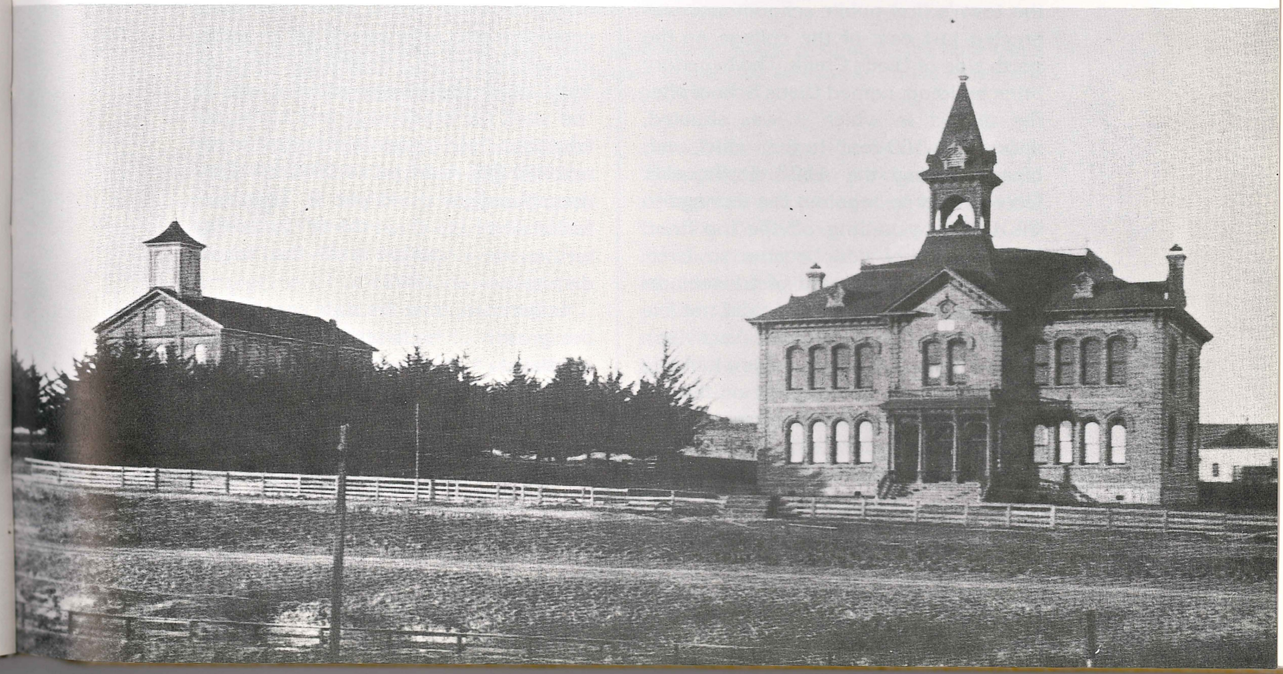


Ulatis School was a far cry from rural schoolhouses like Rhine School in Mix Canyon.

Education

If politics in Vacaville followed the leadership of the town's prominent families, so did education. Public schools began in the 1860s and 1870s, when rural one-room school houses were constructed to serve the needs of farm children scattered throughout the area. By the 1880s, in addition to Ulatis School in Vacaville, there were schools in Lagoon Valley, Pleasants Valley, on Alamo Creek, in the English Hills, in Brown's Valley, and in the Cooper district southeast of Vacaville. Later schools were built in Gate's Canyon and on the Blue Ridge to serve those remote communities. The county superintendent had jurisdiction over rural schools and certified the teachers who were employed, but local influence was always present in the school boards organized to provide financial support.

Regardless of district or board, the curriculum of public elementary schools remained the same. Essentially geared to developing the basic skills of reading, writing, and arithmetic, public schools also indoctrinated students in the fundamental political, religious, economic, and moral values of the prevailing British-American culture. Textbooks like the McGuffey readers or the Swinton series



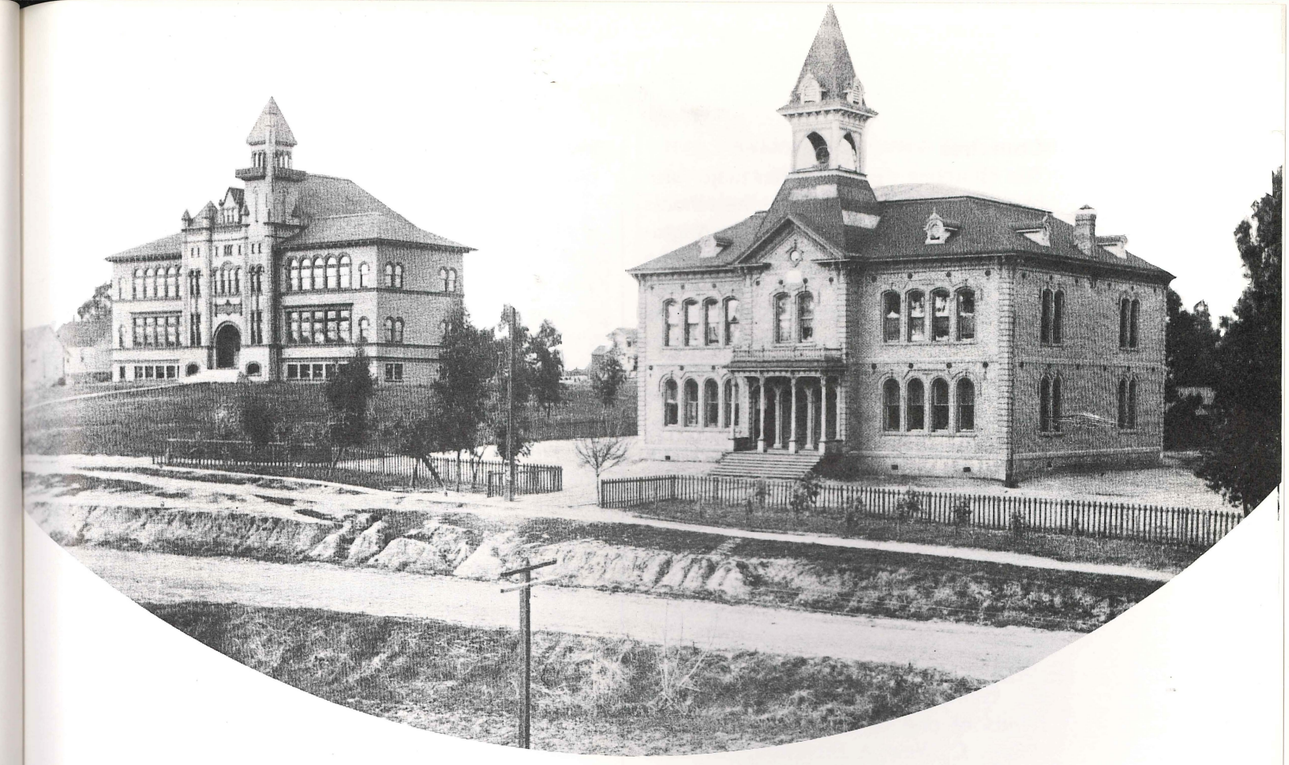
taught students the fundamentals of Christianity, the importance of virtue, the rewards of capitalism, and the essentials of democracy. A stanza from "The Village Blacksmith" in Swinton's Fourth Reader, first published in 1883, indicates the nature of these lessons:

> Toiling—rejoicing—sorrowing,
> Onward through life he goes:
> Each morning sees some task begin,
> Each evening sees its close;
> Something attempted, something done,
> Has earned a night's repose.

Vacaville's first public school graduation exercises took place at the college chapel in May of 1883. Seven students recited, sang, and received their eighth grade diplomas to the delight of their families and friends, who paid fifty cents apiece to witness the event, the money going to an organ fund. Two years later the town's first public schoolhouse was erected just east of the college on the north side of Ulatis Creek. The two-story brick building, named Ulatis School after the district in which it was situated, sported a 100-foot tower, which collapsed during the 1892 earthquake. George Sharpe repaired the damage to the tower by cutting off the top floor, but the school had become so overcrowded that the board of trustees refused to admit children who did not live in the district (now renamed Vacaville). A drive began to construct a new building even though the public debt on the old one was still not paid. Financial troubles delayed action until 1908, when passage of a supplemental bond issue enabled the school board to call for bids. George Sharpe again was the winner, and he completed a $19,700 two-story structure on the same site in time for the opening of classes in 1909.

While the elementary school board wrestled with building problems, action on another front culminated in a public high school for Vacaville. As in other communities with private or church-related academies, Vacaville's California Normal and Scientific School, successor to the Baptist California College, had served as the community high school until increasing costs and declining revenues forced it to close in the late 1880s. The Congregational Church occupied the building until 1892 when the earthquake damaged it so severely it could no longer be used. For the next two years it lay vacant, and in 1895 a contractor tore down the remains in order to use the bricks on Main Street. There was some confusion over who owned the property and what it could be used for, since an 1884 deed of sale stipulated it was to "be used for academical and collegiate education," but a later deed had evidently revoked this restriction so that the Congregationalists could use it. This confusion served to cloud the title and delay further development until the school district took an interest.

In the meantime the state encouraged the growth of high schools by passing legislation that allowed neighboring elementary school districts to consolidate. Under this law the Vacaville Union High School District was formed in 1893 out of the nine districts of Peña, Oakdale,



In 1885, Vacaville constructed its first urban grade school, Ulatis, pictured on the right with a shortened belfry after the original tower collapsed in the 1892 earthquake. In the distance is the high school, completed in 1898 at a cost of $10,000.

Rhine, Milzner, Cooper, Almond, Vacaville, Brown's Valley, and Lagoon. Immediately a high school board was organized, teachers hired, and classes begun in one room of Ulatis School. The arrangement had obvious limitations, although the number of high school students the first three years was small enough to make it temporarily feasible.

In 1895 the University of California fully accredited the new school, and next spring the first graduating class of four students received their diplomas in exercises held at the Presbyterian Church. Then the trustees purchased the old college site and announced a bond election. In 1897 voters authorized $10,000 for the construction of a building, but labor troubles and inflation delayed completion until 1898. Vacaville now had a new high school, a unified high school district, and a crush of students in its elementary school. The next step was to consolidate the rural elementary schools into one large district, but that move did not begin until after World War I.

Churches

The churches were the other major arm of Vacaville society, and like the schools they were dominated by the white Anglo-Saxon Protestant tradition. Despite the Catholic heritage from the Spanish and Mexicans, Catholic representation was small compared to the Protestant majority. By the mid-1880s Vacaville had five active Protestant congregations. The Baptists were led by Jesse B. Saxton, who returned to Vacaville after an interval of several years in 1880. He brought his large family, including two attractive daughters, Jessie and Katherine, and settled down to hold the pastorate for the next decade.

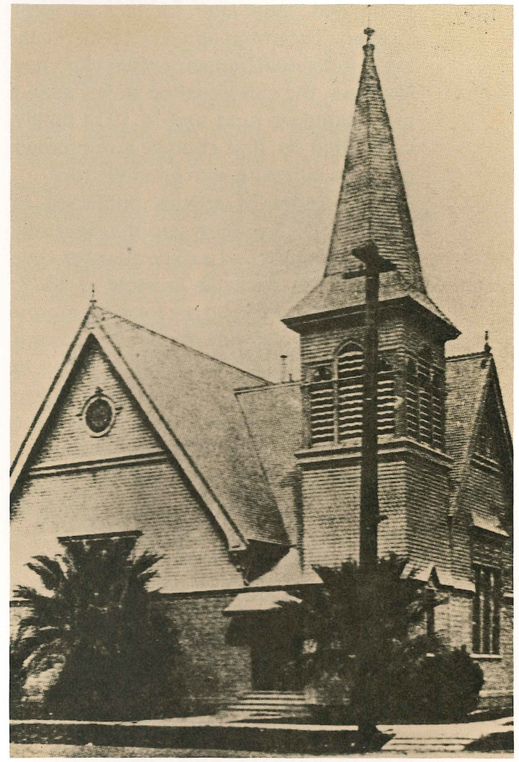
The Presbyterians, organized soon after the Baptists, were weakened by the resignation of the preacher and an elder. But church leadership passed into the hands of one of its charter members, James C. Weir. A Bible-toting Indiana immigrant of Scottish descent, Weir became the guiding light for the church in its early days. He opened his home to the penniless young seminary students from San Francisco who served the church in the 1880s, and as presiding elder he led the congregation in all important decisions affecting the financial and spiritual welfare of the church.

A good organizer and a shrewd judge of character, Weir managed to keep the church solvent and united despite a fire that destroyed the first sanctuary in 1891 and the indiscretions of one pastor hired in Weir's absence. Reminiscing later about the incident, Weir wrote: "He was a man that never should have been in the pulpit. While here he boasted of having played 100 games of pool in one day. . . . After considerable trouble we got rid of him."

Weir disapproved of dancing, and in 1879 the elders unanimously adopted a resolution withholding church membership from any practitioner of that sinful custom. The church also frowned on the theater, as Professor Stilson, head of the local college, learned when he applied for church membership in 1887. J. B. Robinson recorded the elders' reaction in the church session minutes:

> It was objected that Doctor Stilson as principal of the College had been instrumental in introducing frequently, Theatrical Amusements, and himself one of the principal actors, many of the plays or characters in the plays being of an offensive, if not immoral character. Doctor Stilson having been waited on by a member of Session stated that in the East, he and all his folks were regular Theater attenders, also attended and took part in dancing —that though an ordained Deacon He thought it proper and right for Church members to attend and take part in those worldly amusements and that he could not act for the future differently from what he had done in the past. Session voted unanimously not to receive his application, and the Clerk of Session was directed to give back the letter when called for. Closed with prayer.

Older than either the Baptists or the Presbyterians were the Disciples of Christ, or Christians, who organized in 1854 and constructed their first church two miles out of town on the ranch of Arculus C. Hawkins, a charter member. One of the community's early benefactors, Hawkins later moved the Christian Church at his own expense to the site in downtown Vacaville that it occupied for over a century. The church grew slowly, however, and not until 1891 was a new structure built. An L-shaped building with a Gothic roof and an imposing eighty-five-foot tower covered with redwood shingles, it was completed in ninety days by George Sharpe, who received the contract for a bid of $4,975. In 1909 the tower



Above: George Sharpe, the town's master builder. Below: James C. Weir, one of the founders of the Presbyterian Church in 1873. The Christian Church stood across the street from the Raleigh Hotel, which burned in 1909. At the time, the church steeple caught fire, but the rest of the building survived.

was ignited by the Hotel Raleigh fire across the street, but the rest of the building was saved by firemen who managed to put out the flames and topple the smoldering remains to the ground.

In the 1880s at least three other churches were established in the community, but slow development delayed the construction of buildings for separate worship. The Episcopalians, with help from Suisun, finally organized the Vacaville Church of the Epiphany in 1887 but disbanded soon after for lack of local support. They tried again in 1895. Meeting in individual homes or other churches for years, the congregation slowly added to its building fund and in 1914 finally completed its first church, a reinforced concrete structure with a red tile roof.

In a series of articles published in 1938, J. D. Sweeney said the Seventh-Day Adventists had a sixty-member congregation in Vacaville as early as 1877, but evidently they did not formally organize for they do not appear in Edward Wickson's list of Vacaville churches in 1888. The list did include the Congregationalists, however, who established a church in 1884. Beset with financial and membership difficulties, the church apparently merged briefly with the Presbyterians before reorganizing later in the decade. After the college was closed, the Congregationalists held services in the old college chapel until 1892 when they were forced into other quarters by the earthquake. The church remained active into the twentieth century but played only a minor role in Vacaville's Protestant development.

More noteworthy than the Congregational church was a Congregational minister who was born and raised in Vacaville but left the community to become a religious leader and author of national prominence. Chauncey J. Hawkins, grandson of Christian church founder Arculus Hawkins, grew up on his grandfather's ranch near Cooper School. A precocious lad with a scholarly bent, his favorite pastimes, aside from reading, were hiking and hunting with his best friend, a Solano Indian whose love and understanding of nature made a lasting impression on his white companion. Hawkins entered Napa College in the early nineties and graduated from the University of the Pacific in 1896 at age twenty, the youngest of his class. A Doctor of Divinity degree from Yale followed three years later. Over the next three decades he held Congregational pastorates in New Haven, Boston, Seattle, and San Francisco. A liberal innovator in church affairs, he was in the forefront of the social gospel movement. He opened his church doors to secular activities; was friendly with many stage and theater personalities; and was a "father confessor" to concert singers, vaudeville players, and chorus girls.

He was also a noted author, writing many of his books at the home ranch in Vacaville, which he used as a retreat. Drawing on his personal experiences during boyhood hikes in Solano County and later jaunts in the Maine woods, he wrote several books for the Ned Brewster children's series and one moving animal story, **The Little Red Doe**. His

nature tales were secular adventures geared to a juvenile level, but they reveal the romantic sensibilities of a dedicated outdoorsman torn between love for the wilderness and a passion for hunting and fishing.

His books for adult audiences varied from literary treatises like **The Mind of Whittier** to religious tracts such as **Will the Home Survive?** and **The Church and Psychotherapy**. In 1929 his last book, **Do the Churches Dare?**, attacked the anti-intellectual reaction of fundamentalist churches to modern science. Decrying the rise of illiterate "showmen" and "showwomen" like Billy Sunday and Aimee Semple McPherson, he argued that the survival of Protestantism depended on making the teachings of Jesus relevant to the modern world. That same argument can still be heard today, but Hawkins argued no more after 1930. A tragic auto accident during his return to San Francisco from a short Sierra vacation brought an abrupt end to the career of Vacaville's most important theologian.

In an age devoid of radio, television, movies, and automobiles, churches provided recreation as well as religious experience. Church buildings served as auditoriums for a wide variety of secular events; church socials gave neighborhood farmers and their wives some respite from the toils of the week and kept youngsters occupied. Church clubs brought members together for musical events, sewing bees, charitable work, picnics and cookouts, book reviews and debates on public issues, and just plain fun. But undercurrents of denominationalism always limited the appeal of church-sponsored events; those who sought broader social contacts usually found what they wanted in the benevolent and protective societies that proliferated in nineteenth century America.

Fraternal Organizations

Vacaville's record of lodge activity is phenomenal. By 1910 there were at least fourteen different fraternal organizations in town, or more than one club for every eighty-five residents! Oldest were the Masons and the Odd Fellows, both organized in the 1850s. They used the same hall in the early days, at first located behind the Blum residence on Merchant Street, and then on the northwest corner of Main and Elizabeth Streets. After the latter structure burned in 1877, the Odd Fellows moved across the street to their present location. The wooden structure they built in the late 1870s was destroyed by a fire in 1884 but they rebuilt five years later with brick. Except for the damage done by the 1892 earthquake, which toppled the front facade, the building still looks about the same as it did when it was first erected nearly ninety years ago. The interior has changed even less, although the cushioned seats in the lodge room on the second floor, which came from the Vacaville Theater during a remodeling in the 1930s, bear little resemblance to the uncomfortable wooden seats that formerly lined the walls.

The Masons remained on the north side of Main for sixty-five years, rebuilding on the site of the 1877 fire. In 1939

a disastrous fire gutted the building, destroying not only the lodge room and all its furnishings upstairs, but also the telephone exchange and several professional offices and commercial shops housed in the same structure. Since then the Masons have occupied the upper floor of the old Walker Opera House on the southeast corner of Main and Davis Streets.

For the white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant majority, fraternal groups offered a wide variety of associations and activities. Retired farmers and merchants wanting old-age security could join the Woodmen of the World. They offered $1,000 to $3,000 life insurance policies for a $5 membership fee, which included a free medical exam. Wives of Odd Fellows had their social counterpart in the Rebeccas; lady reformers or those interested in civic improvements could join the Women's Christian Temperance Union, the Vacaville Women's Star Club, or the Women's Improvement Club. The Good Templars and the Knights of Pythias were outlets for teetotalers, while romantics who were intrigued by the customs and traditions of the American Indian could belong to the Improved Order of Redmen, Tohopeka Tribe No. 224. Children were not neglected, either. In addition to temperance organizations like the Band of Hope and the Wide Awakes, girls could learn needlecraft in sewing circles, and young men had the opportunity to develop outdoor skills in the Boy Scouts, which Presbyterian minister Arthur C. Fruhling brought to town in 1914. Regardless of the social or moral purposes defined in their charters, all lodges served as recreational outlets in the horse-and-buggy days.

The Ulatis Club

Two local organizations deserve special mention, for despite radically different goals both had long-lasting impact on the community. In 1897 a group of prominent farmers, merchants, and professional men, who liked to play pool and cards but not in the public saloons, organized the Ulatis Club. Originally catering to affluent men of leisure and decorated with landscape paintings supplied by Mrs. E.P. Buckingham, whose son was the first vice-president, the club began with approximately sixty-five members, each paying a fifty-dollar fee to join. By 1903 the membership had grown to over 100, although the social base had been broadened and the fee dropped to a modest five dollars.

As a social force the club was influential in its early days, attracting most of the town's leading male citizens and providing, according to the local newspaper, "any reasonable social gratification." On special occasions club doors were opened to wives, but never to the public. After World War I both the club's membership and its status declined, and in its final days just before World War II it was hardly more than a private saloon.

The Saturday Club

Perhaps the most important club in Vacaville was the Saturday Club, the first women's club in Solano County. Organized in 1909 to "encourage and promote

Katherine, Margaret, and Frank Steiger

the study of musical art in all of its forms and to arrange for a series of high class concerts by the best talent to be secured in San Francisco," its founder and prime mover for over thirty years was well prepared to assume the leadership of the town's musical education.

Katherine Saxton Steiger, daughter of Baptist preacher Jesse B. Saxton, grew up in a talented musical family. Her elder sister Jessie, who married town druggist Jim Miller, was an accomplished musician who played the organ and directed the choir at the Presbyterian and Community churches for many years and gave private music lessons to several generations of Vacaville children. Katherine's musical career more than matched her sister's. Educated in the arts and sciences at Vacaville's college, later working under the direction of a well-known San Francisco musician, she taught school in Solano County before marrying Frank Steiger, Vacaville's city engineer. For nearly twenty years before founding the Saturday Club she offered her musical talents to the community, playing leading roles in community operas and songfests, teaching voice and piano, and serving as organist for the Episcopal Church and the Eastern Star.

Modeled after Sacramento's Saturday Club, the Vacaville club established a series of subscription concerts that brought to town the finest musical talent on the West Coast. Four times a year the chancel of the Presbyterian Church echoed with the sounds of vocal and instrumental music provided by groups such as Paul Steindorff's twenty-two-piece orchestra and the McNeill Club of forty male voices or soloists like Alexander Heinemann, baritone, and Sigmund Beel, violinist. Soon the club outgrew the Presbyterian Church, and for years the meetings were held in the old Walker Opera House. In 1936, after a fire destroyed part of the Vacaville Inn on Merchant Street, the club took over the property and remained there until the Bank of America built a new facility for club members in exchange for the property on which the bank now stands.

In the meantime the club expanded into other activities including art, drama, child welfare, literature, civics, and home improvement. In 1911, after an organized club campaign, the Vacaville school district hired its first music supervisor. The club opened a night school and a sewing class for foreigners, established a women's labor exchange, conducted cleanup campaigns for the creek beds

and the cemetaries, planted trees on school grounds, and sponsored garden and flower shows. After affiliating in 1917 with the California Federation of Women's Clubs it expanded into regional activities, including support for the children's ward at the county hospital and financial contributions to redwood conservation efforts.

The Ulatis Book Club and the Public Library

The Saturday Club's most important early success was establishing a public library for Vacaville. Library efforts for the town had begun in the 1850s when J.W. Anderson's Ulatus Academy opened a small circulating library of religious and technical tracts. Thirty years later the Women's Christian Temperance Union established a reading room on Main Street. The first efforts for general library service began in the early 1890s when plans were made to establish a reading room and a circulating library financed by membership subscriptions. After nearly a decade of delays, the Ulatis Book Club was founded in 1900. With only eighty-four members and 137 volumes on hand, it had obvious limitations, but it survived for ten years and managed to provide the community with a foundation for future library development.

Soon after the Ulatis Book Club began, the Carnegie Library Building Fund opened new opportunities for small towns like Vacaville. In 1905 local efforts were initiated to obtain a $5,000 Carnegie grant, but the San Francisco earthquake turned attention elsewhere. When a new drive began months later the town trustees could not agree on a suitable building site, and they were still bickering in 1910 when the Saturday Club took over the Ulatis Book Club and appointed a committee to take charge of library planning.

In 1912 the club opened a free public library of 500 volumes in a small room on the corner of Main and Dobbins streets. At the same time, taking advantage of a new state law, the club started a campaign to establish a library district under the jurisdiction of the Vacaville Union High School District. Voters gave the plan overwhelming approval in the fall elections, and the five-cent property tax imposed by the new library trustees brought in over $1,000 a year for maintenance and new purchases. That met one of Carnegie's stipulations, which called for local support of at least 10 percent of the amount granted for a building. The only remaining problem was to find a site.

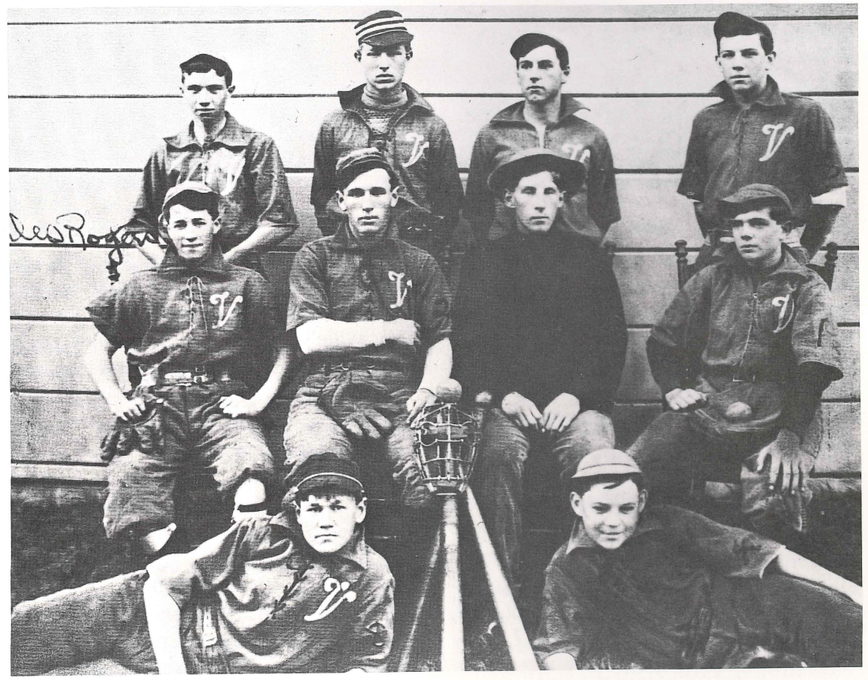
Despite an effort by some residents to locate the library on the high school grounds, which was already public property, the trustees finally decided to build in the business district. In 1914, after learning that the Carnegie Fund had upped its offer to $12,500 if the town would provide the land, they gave Thomas S. Wilson a $3,000 promissory note in turn for a corner lot on Main and Parker streets. Two months later, with Carnegie satisfied, town officials prepared drawings and called for bids.

George Sharpe was both a bidder and a trustee, but to avoid a conflict of interest he resigned his town position before the bids were opened. His bid of $11,815 was $388 more than F.M. Gray's, but the trustees awarded Sharpe the contract anyway, and he completed the structure in six months. The reinforced concrete building with its typical Carnegie library facade served the community half a century before the library was moved to its present quarters on Merchant Street. Turned over to private developers in the sixties, the old building now houses a restaurant and an antique shop.

Sports

Recreation in Vacaville was not confined to indoor activities. Organized sports such as baseball, basketball, horse-racing, boxing, and trap shooting were popular in the eighties and nineties, and individual or group activities like roller-skating, tennis, bicycling, hiking, and picnicking occupied the leisure time of most young people. The Vacaville Sportsmen's Club flourished in the early days, sponsoring shooting contests for both young and old. In March of 1883,

Vacaville High School baseball team, 1907



one special event was called off, reported the newspaper, "owing principally to the fact that many of the young men of the club had been dancing till 'St. Patrick's Day in the Morning,' and were so sleepy they could not look along the sights."

Baseball. Baseball was perhaps the most popular organized sport, at least before World War II. For seventy years Vacaville baseball clubs annually took the field to defend the hometown against regional rivals. Just ten years after the founding of the Ulatis baseball club in 1873 the town supported two amateur clubs, the Wind-splitters and the Daisy Cutters, the latter captained by John Peña. William Butcher's pasture south of town was a favorite playing field—the "finest place for a game of baseball in this whole country," concluded the **Reporter**. A few games in the early eighties were played at Oiler's Grove, a picnic ground and campsite along Ulatis Creek south of Vacaville operated by J.M. Oiler, who had ambitions of developing a community recreation center. To attract visitors he built a dance pavilion and a roller-skating rink, but most baseball club members preferred Butcher's field or other sites nearer town, and after a few unprofitable seasons Oiler gave up the idea and moved to Modoc County.

By the 1890s baseball had entered the rural schools, and informal leagues were organized with mixed teams of boys and girls representing nearly every grade from elementary to high school. So popular was the sport that in 1897 merchants closed their doors one afternoon so the entire town could turn out to witness Vacaville's first battle of the sexes—a match between Vacaville's men's club and the Boston Bloomer Girls who were touring the West. Over 900 people paid twenty-five cents each to watch, but if they expected a lively contest they were disappointed. According to the newsman the girls were "on the bum," their championship pitcher Miss Maude Nelson was a pushover, and the local team sailed to a sixteen-to-one victory.

Regional league play began as early as 1904, with Vacaville entering the six-team Central California Baseball League, which included Vallejo, Suisun, Napa, and two San Francisco clubs. Each team contributed to a kitty, which went to the championship club at the end of a split season, but team members played essentially for fun. Indeed, they spent more money on their own travel and uniforms than they could ever hope to collect as champions. Over the years this pattern of semipro ball was repeated, although in some years not enough regional interest developed to organize a league. But Vacaville's young men joined clubs whether or not league play was involved. By the late 1930s there were at least seven local teams in the field, including one all-Japanese club.

While no local boys rose to become national baseball stars, the Zupo family in Vacaville contributed enough virile young male talent to field a team almost by itself. In the late 1920s and early 1930s Tony Zupo managed the Vacaville team to two straight Northern California Baseball League pennants. One brother,

The high school girls' basketball team

James, pitched for the club and another brother, Mack, was a star batter.

Boxing. Later in the thirties Mack Zupo became a professional boxer, fighting under such formidable aliases as "Grabby Maxie," "Buckhorn Tornado," and "One-Punch Maxie." He was following a popular Vacaville sport, for prize fighting had been part of local recreation since the late 1880s. In 1889 the Vacaville Athletic Club opened in a store room previously used as a tamale factory. William McLain, the promoter, attracted crowds by inducing local lads to fight each other and gave them a small cut from the fifty-cent admission charge. Joseph Stadfeld, the town's huge constable, put his San Francisco boxing experience to good use in refereeing many of these early fights. McLain's ambition was boundless, and in December of 1889, perhaps more as a publicity gimmick than as a serious proposal, he wired the world heavyweight champion in Boston: "The Vacaville Athletic Club will offer purse, forty-five thousand dollars for finish fight between you and Jackson. Answer care **Reporter**." Back came a devastating reply: "Little Willie McLain, Vacaville Cal. R-A-T-S! John L. Sullivan."

Vacaville did share in the glory of world

championship boxing, however—if only vicariously through one of its native sons. In 1909 James Rago, known to the boxing world as Jimmy Reagan, won the world's bantam weight championship in San Francisco and collected a $2,000 purse. An aggressive little puncher nicknamed "the human propeller blade," Reagan was born in the English Hills in 1889. He retired from the ring in 1918 and eventually went to work as a barber on the San Francisco-Chicago run of the Southern Pacific Railroad, where he used to swap stories with Hiram Johnson and other travelers.

Racing. Boxing was strictly a man's sport, but not so the "sport of kings," which came to Vacaville mostly in the form of harness racing. Trotting horses raised and trained in Vaca Valley were racing at county fairs and race tracks in northern California throughout the eighties and nineties. In 1892 five horse fanciers from Vacaville and Elmira, including J.M. Bassford, Jr., Dr. J.W. Stitt, and O.H. Allison, incorporated the Vaca Valley Driving Association and constructed a race track near town, which was the scene of a number of racing events. At the local festivities on July 4, 1892, twenty-five entries competed in five races. The Vacaville organization disappeared after the turn of the century, but local breeders continued to supply blooded stock for the California market.

In 1923 Vacaville's horse-racing tradition gained national attention when a young lady jocky drove her own horse to victory at the May Day races in Dixon. Hellen Davis, daughter of George W. and Mattie Davis, had grown up with horses on her father's ranch southeast of Vacaville. Her triumph in 1923 began a racing career that spanned more than twenty years. Like Mrs. E.P. Buckingham, she was a bold innovator in a field almost exclusively masculine, and by the mid-1920s she was recognized as "the only girl trainer and driver of race horses in America."

Hellen's masculine dress and close-cropped hair may have shocked some social swells, but in racing circles and in her hometown she was a popular heroine. With a stable of fast horses like Lady Belle D, Palo Cres, and Palomin, she followed the racing circuit up and down the West Coast, winning enough to keep her in the racing limelight if not in the lap of luxury. Her biggest triumph was at Saratoga Springs, New York, in 1945, where aside from being recognized as "the nation's top woman driver of harness horses," she created considerable stir by harnessing one of her horses to a sulky and driving to the famous resort's retail district. Parking the rig like an automobile and carrying goggles and whip, she proceeded to shop like an ordinary tourist.

Performing Arts

While racing was fashionable in Vacaville it could not match the popularity of the performing arts in late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Despite its rural setting, the town supported a wide variety of musical and dramatic events. In the thirty years before World War I

Professor Theodore Ryhiner, bandmaster virtuoso, taught dozens of young musicians.

the town's leading virtuouso was Professor Theodore Ryhiner, a talented German immigrant who joined the faculty of the local college in 1877 after leaving his homeland to escape Chancellor Bismarck's compulsory military service. As professor of music and languages, Ryhiner taught at the school until it closed in the late 1880s. Then he opened a retail store on Main Street and a studio in his home on the hill above the Southern Pacific depot.

Totally immersed in his work, Ryhiner never felt comfortable outside the world of music. According to his grandson, his music room was a clutter of coronets, mandolins, violins, and other instruments he used for private instruction. A surviving diary from the eighties, written in mixed German and English, describes regular one-man cultural excursions. The entry for Thursday, January 3, 1889, is typical: "Took morning train to San Frso massive stores matinee Mazulin at Grand Opera house, clothing stores etc. evening at Tivoli saw Night in Venice, fine—daisy!"

A performer as well as an instructor, Ryhiner appeared in concert before dozens of local audiences. He was also a director and is best remembered for developing Vacaville's first brass bands. Popular, but voluntary and self-supporting, these early musical groups usually folded as quickly as they arose. Ryhiner reorganized regularly in an effort to keep solvent, but without outside help it was a losing battle. Private donors provided sufficient funds in the late 1890s to support Sunday evening summer band concerts on Main Street, and in 1902 the town trustees began a subsidy of six dollars per concert, but even that failed to mollify band members. That summer they revolted. Refusing to perform during the July 4 parade without a decent wage, they precipitated a musical crisis that frustrated both bandsmen and public. Brass bands revived later in the decade, but without Professor Ryhiner. After 1902 he retreated to the sanctity of his studio and spent his remaining years giving private lessons.

Local talent provided only part of Vacaville's musical and theatrical entertainment. Live stage shows and individual performers plying the Bay Area trade frequently visited the town before

1900. Compared to the blackface minstrels and the cheap circus acts that later appeared, the caliber of this early entertainment was high. In 1892 the Russell Dramatic Company performed "The Blue and the Gray" and "Brother Against Brother" to packed houses in Bowle's Opera House. That same year two popular farces, "Sleeping Queen" and "Widows Bewitched," were staged before enthusiastic audiences by the Wilkie Operetta Company. Richard Foote, popular young tragedian, appeared in Vacaville in 1890 to read Shakespeare, but his visit was marred by the town marshal who tried to arrest him for not paying the five-dollar fee required of all traveling shows. The incident ended amicably and Foote returned for another performance two years later.

Shortly after 1900 Vacaville entered the nickelodeon age like the rest of America, and gradually live theater gave way to the movies as the community's most popular art form. In 1909 W.S. Godfrey opened the Grand, Vacaville's first theater designed exclusively for motion pictures. Nestora Lyon, a descendant of the Vaca and Peña families, started the Central Theater in 1912, but two years later Godfrey bought her out and closed the Central's doors. He monopolized the local movie business until after World War I, when the Grand changed both hands and names. Known as the Strand until the late twenties, its chief attraction was an $1,800 Wurlitzer organ.

Music could be enjoyed anywhere. A drying yard was the setting for this picnic-concert.

Although movies replaced regular professional live theater, occasional stage shows and individual performances could still be seen in town after 1910, mostly under the auspices of the Saturday Club or some other benevolent organization. In 1913, however, the Chautauqua came to town for the first time.

Originating in the 1870s as a means of educating and uplifting the culture of rural America through lectures and high-caliber entertainment, the Chautauqua troupes toured the country for nearly half a century. In a huge tent that could accommodate up to 2,000 people, Vacaville audiences participated in a six-day extravaganza that included music, lectures, games for children, band concerts, and dramatic readings. The 1913 Vacaville program, said the paper, was "the most delightful and instructive series of entertainments in the history of the town."

In its five separate appearances between 1913 and 1921, the Chautauqua brought to Vacaville such stellar attractions as Ben Turpin playing Abe Lincoln; Victor Murdock discussing his personal observations of the European War; the Boston Lyric Opera Company; Mezzo-contralto Madame Fay Morvillios; the Royal Venetian Band; Reverend W.L. Mellinger lecturing on "Misunderstood Mexico"; original readings by "Dick Posey, the Western James Whitcomb Riley"; comedy by the Keighley New York Players; and a lecture by Carveth Wells, noted explorer and academician. Unfortunately Vacaville could not always meet its minimum guarantees, and doubtless other small towns had similar problems. The Chautauqua's days were numbered anyway by the movies and the automobile, and after World War I the movement dwindled rapidly.

Social Services

Social services are an integral part of social history and merit comment in this chapter. In the field of medical care Vacaville before the twentieth century was on a par with other rural communities, which means it had a few country doctors and a dentist or two but no facilities for major medical care. Soon after incorporation the town trustees established a five-member board of health to supervise all health matters and authorized the establishment of a "pest house" where victims of contagious diseases could be isolated, but these were minimal preventive measures. The first hospital in town was established in 1897 by Drs. Stitt and Terrill. According to the papers it was an

impressive facility in the middle of an orchard, complete with a trained graduate nurse, a competent matron, and all necessary equipment. Evidently it did not last long, for no further mention was made of it. Much later a small facility for maternal and outpatient care was established on Elizabeth Street, but seriously ill patients continued to go either to San Francisco or Sacramento until Fairfield got a hospital.

Despite inadequate facilities Vacaville generally revered its doctors and dentists. J.W. Stitt, one of the town's earliest physicians, arrived in 1883 from Kentucky. In the nineties W.E. Alumbaugh, a "homeopathic physician," located in town but became embroiled in a controversy over one of his patients who died of typhoid fever. Critics said Alumbaugh had diagnosed a brain concussion, but he stoutly denied the charge. Evidently he decided to practice elsewhere, but one of his sons later returned to open a medical office.

The best known and most beloved of Vacaville's doctors was W.C. Jenney, a graduate of the Chicago Homeopathic Medical College at the turn of the century. He arrived in 1902, set up an office over Kopp's Bakery on Merchant Street, and began a practice that lasted over fifty years. The archetype of a country doctor, Jenney was so devoted to his patients he responded day or night to their needs or requests without regard to his own welfare. According to close friends he spent more time on house calls than in his office. Never refusing service to anyone, he was so nonchalant about money that

A rare snapshot of Dr. Jenney

he charged what he felt the patient could pay and often either canceled the bill on the spot or forgot to collect it. His favorite prescriptions were for powders he mixed himself or had prepared. "Dr. Jenney's Linament" and "Dr. Jenney's Salve" were so familiar to local residents that the Vacaville Drug Company made up the concotions in bulk quantities and sold them over the counter like standard patent remedies.

In public emergencies Vacaville turned to the local Red Cross. Organized in 1898 to prepare bandages during the Spanish-

During World War I the Red Cross paraded to promote bond sales and other functions.

American War, the local chapter came to the aid of refugees during the San Francisco earthquake and fire of 1906. While a full complement of Vacaville's young men left for national guard duty to protect the stricken city from looters, local women of the Red Cross set up tents; gathered bedding, food, and clothing; and cared for over fifty destitute victims.

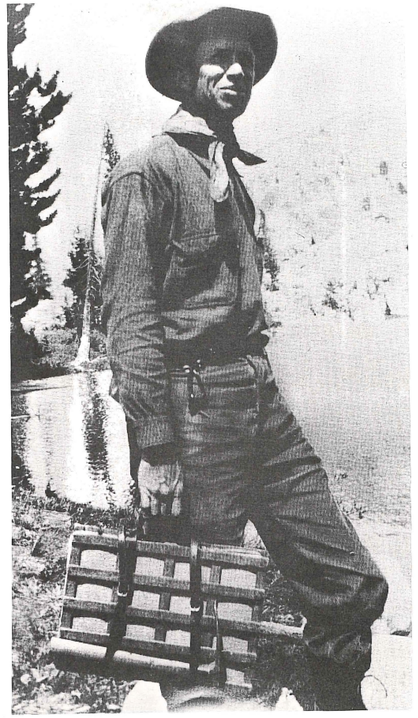
The Vacaville militia disbanded in 1910 because of declining local interest, but the Red Cross remained active. During World War I it organized food and clothing drives for Belgian Relief, raised over $12,000 for the national chapter, and sent hundreds of Christmas packages to American soldiers. Its biggest test came during the influenza epidemic of 1918-1919 when Vacaville reported over sixty serious cases in less than a month. While the town trustees passed an emergency ordinance requiring all persons to wear gauze masks in public, the Red Cross operated two emergency hospitals. One was on Davis Street at the campgrounds of the Women's Land Army (volunteer girls from San Francisco who picked fruit for the war effort during the labor shortage of that year). The other emergency hospital was located in the annex of the Presbyterian Church, which ordinarily served as a game room and basketball court. Using donated bedding, rags and food, volunteer nurses and cooks worked round the clock to keep patients comfortable and prevent exposure of outsiders. Ten patients died before the emergency was over.

During the first part of the epidemic, and for over thirty years afterward, the Red Cross was led by Leila Lindley McKevitt, the daughter of a prominent Sacramento merchant. She moved to Vacaville in 1909 after her new husband, Frank B. McKevitt, Jr., took over management of the Pinkham and McKevitt Fruit Company. An indefatigable worker and a decisive manager, she took charge of the Red Cross in 1917 and guided the fund-raising drives during the war. When the epidemic struck she worked at the emer-

gency hospitals along with the rest of the staff, temporarily leaving the service when she took ill herself.

By 1919 Mrs. McKevitt was back as deputy chairman and director of the home service program. She helped organized Vacaville's first community nurse program in 1920 with the Red Cross and the school district sharing the expenses. The next year her organization assisted local doctors in establishing a temporary clinic where seventy-five young patients lost their tonsils. To gather new recruits she sent teams on door-to-door campaigns, one volunteer even walking the streets pounding a dishpan and shouting "come to the Red Cross meeting!" As distributor of funds she rarely refused needy callers who knocked on her door day or night, but dubious cases she sent to the town constable who by prearranged signal turned them down. Active in practically every community organization and campaign between 1910 and 1950, she was an outstanding example of personal service for the public good.

Public service also marked the career of Vacaville's most noted scientist, Willis Lynn Jepson, son of a Kentucky pioneer who joined the Gold Rush in 1850. Born in 1867 on the Jepson ranch just two miles from downtown Vacaville, Willis showed an early interest in nature study. While attending California Normal in the 1880s he scoured the surrounding hills for biology specimens. One day he found an unknown flower on Blue Ridge and sent it to Berkeley for identification. Imagine his excitement when the university wrote back that it was a new species and was to be named in his honor! That was the beginning of an outstanding career in botany.



Professor Willis Jepson, botanist and author of *The Trees of California*

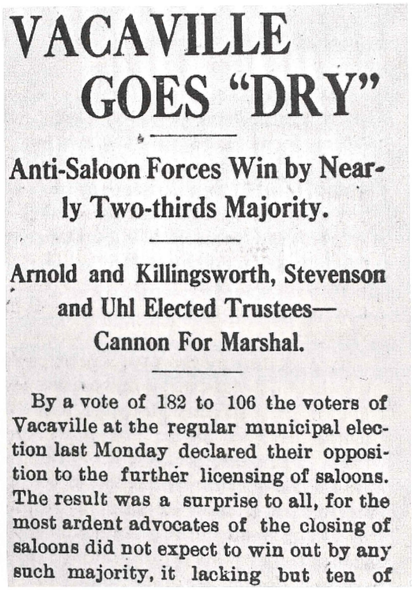
After earning a college degree in Vacaville, Jepson went on to postgraduate work at the University of California, Cornell, Harvard, and Berlin. He was Vacaville's first Ph.D. (1899), and the first Ph.D. in the field of botany at the University of California. For nearly half a century he was on the Berkeley faculty, teaching, studying, and exploring the world of plants. An academic pioneer, he helped organize the university's division of forestry, and he went on to become the foremost authority on California flora. His books and articles on the trees and flowering plants in his native state (for example, **The Trees of California** (1909) and **Illustrated Manual of Flowering Plants of California** (1925)) are still regarded as authorities in the field. Jepson was an active conservationist, joining a select group of scholars in 1892 as a charter member of the Sierra Club, and later helping found the Save-the-Redwoods League. His academic achievements earned him many honors in both the United States and in England.

For all his honors and aspirations, Willis Jepson never forgot Vacaville. The town and its pastoral setting always remained in his heart. Every chance he got he returned to walk the familiar paths of his boyhood and reminisce with family and friends. From correspondence provided by Mrs. Ruth T. Hill (daughter of Neat Tate who was a close friend of Willis's and a fellow scholar) we get a glimpse of Jepson's lifelong fascination with the land of his youth:

> The distribution of the native trees in the home township [he wrote in 1942] I have worked out fairly well—but one thing remains. In that little range of hills which runs southerly from what you call Burton Hill to Cement Hill, the Blue Oak (Quercus douglasii) and Interior Live Oak (Quercus wislizenii) dominate the east slope. There are a few Valley Oak (Quercus lobata) trees here and there and, when I was a lad, a very few Black Oak (Quercus Kelloggii) trees. It is a question, maybe, if there be any Black Oak now. If you care to join me, I would like sometime to make a hike through those hills to see how things are. According to my memory and according to old photographs the cover of native trees, save for one contour . . . cut almost clean for stove wood a few years ago, is four times as **dense** today as when I was a lad. Fire has been kept out over a period of seventy years except only twice—which is a record.

Illness late in life reduced Jepson's body but not his spirit. At the age of seventy-nine—four years after writing the letter above—he died at his Berkeley home. Now he rests in the family plot in Vacaville—near the hills he loved.

Fighting Demon Rum



VACAVILLE GOES "DRY"

Anti-Saloon Forces Win by Nearly Two-thirds Majority.

Arnold and Killingsworth, Stevenson and Uhl Elected Trustees—Cannon For Marshal.

By a vote of 182 to 106 the voters of Vacaville at the regular municipal election last Monday declared their opposition to the further licensing of saloons. The result was a surprise to all, for the most ardent advocates of the closing of saloons did not expect to win out by any such majority, it lacking but ten of

Small town values inspired the most important social reform movement in Vacaville's history. Led locally by the Protestant churches, the temperance movement was promoted on a national scale by an organization that had sprung up in the 1870s in the wake of a brief but important phenomenon known as the women's crusade.

Women's Crusade and W.C.T.U.

Late in 1873, inspired by a temperance lecturer and a lengthy prayer service, a determined group of seventy-five women marched into the downtown saloons of Xenia, Ohio, and induced most of the proprietors, by an artful combination of moral suasion and violence, to close their doors. Almost overnight what happened in Ohio happened over and over again in cities and towns across the country, but primarily in the Midwest, where the Protestant influence was the strongest. By 1874 the women's crusade had closed at least 3,000 saloons and had launched the postwar temperance movement, which was materially aided by the scandals of the Grant administration, especially the excesses of the Whiskey Ring, which demonstrated in the minds of many Americans the unmitigated evils of the liquor lobby.

The women's crusade dwindled rapidly, but in its wake came an organization that was destined to become the guiding spirit of the temperance movement. In November 1874 another group of dedicated women gathered in Cleveland, Ohio, and founded the Women's Christian Temperance Union (W.C.T.U.).

Leading the group, first as secretary and after 1879 as president, was Frances E. Willard, a remarkable bundle of fire and spirit whose intellect and charm inspired thousands of loving followers around the world. Diminutive in stature but a dynamo of human energy, Miss Willard averaged a speech a day for the rest of her life. She traveled through every state in the Union on a whirlwind campaign in 1883 and organized a local chapter in every city of over 10,000 population in the country.

During Miss Willard's visit to the Bay Area, she "saw the opium curse in San Francisco alongside the alcoholic curse." Soon after her visit Vacaville began to marshal the forces of local temperance, continuing the crusade in which Good Templars and other reformers had failed in the 1860s and 1870s. Northern California already had twenty-two W.C.T.U. chapters with 1,000 members.

As in the case of the national women's crusade nine years before, the Vacaville movement was led by women of the local churches, especially the Presbyterian Church. Looking to the needs of the youth of the community first, the Presbyterian ladies under Miss M.E. Elliott in August organized the Vacaville Band of Hope. Local boys and girls, like those in hundreds of other communities where Band of Hope clubs existed, took pledges not to drink, smoke, chew, or swear and vowed to help improve the moral values of other children as well. The ladies of the church also provided the momentum that led to the formation of Vacaville's W.C.T.U. chapter on January 6, 1887, with Mrs. W.C. Donoho as president.

Other Soldiers in the Battle Against Booze

The Christian ladies of Vacaville were not the only ones hoisting the local banner of temperance. The Pacific Methodist College and, after the southern Methodists, the Baptists of California College, raised the voice of Christian education and temperance in the community. In the 1880s their successor, the California Normal and Scientific School, offered its stately brick edifice on College Hill to host numerous temperance activities, and its faculty and students zealously crusaded for the cause. Sunday evenings at the college chapel were filled with temperance lectures from state W.C.T.U. organizers or performances of the era's most popular temperance play, "Ten Nights in a Barroom." Students pressed the case for abstinence in debates and letters to the **Vacaville Reporter**.

Supplementing and complementing the college were the numerous fraternal organizations in the community, including the Masons, Odd Fellows, Knights of Pythias, Ancient Order of United Woodmen, the Chosen Friends, and the Good Templars, all professed opponents of that implacable enemy, "Demon Rum." Finally, there were the temperance politicians, members and leaders of the Prohibition Party, which had its national beginnings in 1869. In the fall of 1874 two major temperance groups came together to form the California Prohibition Party and endorsed John Bidwell, California's perennial temperance favorite.

Prominent Prohibitionists

Vacaville had two prominent prohibitionists, both orchard men with political aspirations. One was W.W. Smith, whose twenty-two votes in the 1888 election, when he ran as a prohibitionist candidate for Congress, was a dismal showing compared to that of the winner, Joseph McKenna. Nevertheless, Smith was an important figure in the movement until personal financial reverses, coupled with a family scandal in which he was sued by a woman who claimed he had fathered five illegitimate children, cost him the bulk of his fortune and his local reputation. Smith left town, and the name Smith became so conspicuous by its absence that in 1933 Vacaville attracted national publicity when a **San Francisco Chronicle** reporter made the extravagant but erroneous claim that "out of all the cities and towns in the world this one alone has neither Smith nor Jones in it." (In checking the incredible story, the **Vacaville Reporter** staff found that the **Chronicle**'s own local dealer was Maude E. Smith. Evidently no one bothered to check all the other "cities and towns in the world.")

The other important Prohibition Party leader in the community was George Washington Thissell, an Ohio carriage maker whose published memoirs describing an adventurous crossing of the plains in 1849 form a colorful part of Gold Rush literature. The Thissell home in Pleasants Valley was a clearinghouse for temperance information and activities. The Thissells hosted a wide variety of gatherings, including the Pleasants Valley Lyceum, where friends and relatives congregated to hear lectures on alcohol and other manifestations of sin.

A strict prohibitionist, Thissell would have nothing to do with halfway measures like the high license movement, which was designed to drive the cheap saloons out of business and leave the liquor traffic to the proprietors of classier establishments. His all-out war on booze elevated him to the chairmanship of the Solano County Prohibition Party in 1860. His zeal is illustrated by the fact that he helped get Bidwell 146 votes in the county, 38 percent of which came from Vacaville's three small precincts. Thissell was one of the driving forces for local option after the Anti-Saloon League began its great drive in the first decade of the twentieth century, but he died in 1908 and missed the climax of the local movement.

The Pros and Cons of Prohibition

All of this organized temperance activity might mislead the casual observer into concluding that Vacaville was either bone dry and sinless or so drowned in its cups that special efforts were needed to rescue it from the clutches of Satan. Actually the town was neither saintly nor sodden, but somewhere in between like most other California rural communities of its size and composition. In 1883 visitors could spend the night in at least a second-class hotel, buy their groceries in one of three general stores, have bad teeth extracted by the dentist, send their laundry to the cleaners, buy slabs of salt pork or ham hocks at the butcher shop, get harness

Elmira was the last refuge of determined imbibers after Vacaville went dry in 1909.

fixed at the saddlers, have watches repaired or modest ornaments made at the jewelers, arrange for funerals at the undertakers, save their souls at any one of three churches, or drown their sorrows in one or more of the half-dozen saloons, which were the most conspicuous part of the business district.

With the exception of the college, saloons were the focal points of social activity in the town. At their best they provided a variety of social services: halls where townfolk could meet; recreational centers to relieve the monotony of life in an isolated rural community; theaters for artists and singers; even welfare centers where the indigent could get a free lunch (if they liked salty crackers and cold cuts) or the latest bit of news about available jobs and wages. At their worst they preyed on human weakness and were arenas for vice and violence.

It was hard to see the good side of saloons in a local society imbued with the staunch Christian ethics of nineteenth-century Protestantism. Even the defenders of the local establishments—and there were few in Vacaville—had to admit that most of the town's social evils were in one way or another aided and abetted by the presence of the saloons. For example, an early murder in 1867, grew out of a saloon fight between David Gordon and William Bryon, both participants imbibing rather heavily just before the altercation. Gordon was convicted of man-

slaughter and soon released; later he murdered a man in Missouri and was sentenced to death, but the sentence eventually was commuted to life imprisonment.

Saloons also contributed to juvenile delinquency, as John N. Sweeney, a graduate of Vacaville Normal, remembered years later. Because of the free flow of liquor and the absence of controls, dances in the local community were often enlivened by the presence of booze. Frequently after a big dance many empty and half empty bottles could be found behind the old dance hall near the Ulatis Bridge on Main Street. Sweeney and a collection of college lads found such a pile one afternoon following a dance the night before, and one fellow decided to sample some of the remains. It must have been a rather heavy sample, for Sweeney and a teetotaling friend eventually had to drag the stumbling and staggering imbiber home. They propped him up in front of the door and left him with the unenviable task of telling his parents what had happened. Worse even than this was the potential for promiscuity that the bottle seemed to offer.

Sweeney recalled passing by the open door of a saloon one day and overhearing two disreputable youths plotting to prime a local girl with drink so they could take advantage of her. Outraged by the thought, Sweeney wrote an anonymous letter to the newspaper revealing the plot, and later learned, no doubt with some trepidation, that the two schemers had sworn revenge on the correspondent if they ever found out who it was. The incident made a believer out of Sweeney: "that was one of the many things," he wrote, "which led us to oppose the traffic in strong drink."

There were other incidents. Church-going ladies on a Sunday evening in 1883 were deeply affronted by a drunk who stumbled out of a Main Street bar, cursing foully and "creating a nuisance." That indignity produced a drive that led to the construction of Vacaville's first drunk tank. In the same year a young man who worked on a threshing crew went to town on Saturday night, got roaring drunk at Miller's Saloon near the Vacaville depot, and fell in Ulatis Creek on his way home. They found his body later, explained James D. McClain, another temperance leader, adding with unctuous disdain: "the fact that strong drink was his master is known to all."

The Wages of Sin

If strong drink didn't kill directly, opponents could catalog a list of related evils that accompanied the liquor traffic. One was prostitution. In the early 1890s Vacaville town trustees learned the sordid details of a raid on one brothel and the arrest of two of the town's citizens, although both were dismissed in justice court. The story triggered demands to rid the community of pimps and prostitutes, but if an antivice campaign resulted it was of short duration, for prostitution in Vacaville was at least an intermittent activity as late as World War II. According to one native resident, there were at least four bordellos in the Chinese and Japanese districts north of Main Street.

Another bosom buddy of alcohol was gambling. The Main Street saloons hosted a variety of games, although the favorite among whites was poker. In Chinatown two companies operated both fan-tan games and Chinese lotteries. Despite frequent raids in the Chinese district, these operations continued well into the thirties, long after gambling had been abolished by a series of city ordinances beginning in 1903, when the board of trustees banished nickel slot machines.

If the town needed evidence that liquor and cards were dangerous companions, it got a full measure in 1900, when Jeff Dobbins, son of one of the town's leading citizens, shot and killed Eldridge Boyd Ball at John Burns' saloon (embarrassingly located in the building owned by the Odd Fellows, one of the community's leading temperance societies). During a lengthy poker game, with drinks flowing freely, Jeff Dobbins suddenly cursed Ball and Ball called Dobbins a liar. Jeff drew the pistol his father had given him to "defend the name of Dobbins" and pumped two bullets into his adversary, who died several hours later. The lengthy and sensational court proceedings that followed disgraced the family and nearly ruined the Dobbins' family fortune, and despite his father's efforts to keep him out of jail, Jeff was convicted of murder and sentenced to life imprisonment at San Quentin. Another tavern brawl a year later was less sensational but just as deadly. An argument over a dice game in the Depot Saloon led to a fight and the death of one man, who, said the newspaper editor, had been a heavy drinker "when in funds." The jury ruled self-defense.

Gambling, prostitution, juvenile delinquency, destitution, desertion of family, and demoralization of society—these were the wages of sin brought on by the liquor traffic. To the temperance advocates in Vacaville and elsewhere, drinking was the root of most, if not all, evils, and society could not rest until the scourge was eliminated, which of course meant a total ban on alcohol production and sales.

The Liquor Lobby and Legal Prohibition

To shut down the liquor traffic was no easy task even in a town so overtly hostile to alcohol as Vacaville. The power of the liquor lobby was felt time and again when major issues arose that affected its interests. The ten-year struggle to incorporate the town, for example, was partly due to saloon owners' opposition. Liquor dealers feared the business effects of licensing and organized law enforcement. Even after incorporation, the passage of ordinances making public drunkenness a misdemeanor and establishing a curfew to keep minors under sixteen off the streets after nine p.m. (so that they could not, in the opinion of one anonymous mother, hang around the saloons where they might be tempted) merely scratched the surface symptoms and did not get to the root of the social problems attributed to the liquor trade. The fact that licensing and curfews were ineffective made temperance advocates

all the more determined to pass stronger measures, but how could the power of the liquor lobby be overcome?

Anti-Saloon League organizers provided an answer in the 1890s. Don't waste energy on peripheral problems, they urged; concentrate all your energies and resources on one central task: banning the liquor traffic by legislative action. From its inception in 1893 to the climax in 1919 when the Nineteenth Amendment was ratified, the Anti-Saloon League stuck doggedly to its goal. In the end, it proved its strategy and tactics superior to those of the W.C.T.U., which had diffused its energies by undertaking a broad-based program of social reform, including women's suffrage and campaigns against tobacco, gambling, prostitution, four-letter words, nude painting, dime novels, polygamy, and the **Police Gazette**, as well as "demon rum."

Working with churches, political reformers, lodges, or any other group or individual willing to assist in the cause, the Anti-Saloon League raised and spent $2 million a year on the "one great cause," and some of its tactics were ethically dubious. But as one league official said, when it came to fighting alcohol, "ethics be hanged." Such belligerent fanaticism paid dividends, for by 1910 thirteen states and Alaska, Puerto Rico, and the District of Columbia had gone legally dry, and twenty more had passed restrictive statutes. In addition, many states that were still wet had local option districts. One historian has estimated that by the beginning of the second decade of the twentieth century—long before total prohibition in the United States—95 percent of the country and over two-thirds of the population were wholly or partly under liquor restriction.

The Town Goes Dry

Vacaville was one of the early dry districts, thanks to the combined efforts of the local Anti-Saloon League, the Ladies' Improvement Club, and various other pressure groups. The first phase of the long campaign began in 1903, when the town trustees raised the price of a liquor license from a modest $25 to a restrictive $150 per quarter. Under pressure from the antisaloon forces, the trustees turned down George Miller's application for a license even at the high rate, turning a cold shoulder to the impassioned but to them irrelevant argument of attorney Raleigh Barcar that the city could not use licensing power to prohibit "legitimate" business. Barcar's speech didn't help Miller, and it triggered an all-out effort by the opponents of strong drink to make the business "illegitimate" in Vacaville.

Reverend J.E. Denton of the local Anti-Saloon League took the lead over the next two years in urging further legislation. First came petitions in 1904 seeking a ban on the renewal of quarterly liquor licenses. Failing that, additional petitions were presented in 1905 calling for a public vote on local option. The league even surprised the trustees by offering to bear the full expenses of a special election. The trustees accepted a $150 deposit but then decided not to take the question to the people—a move hardly calculated to appease the anti-

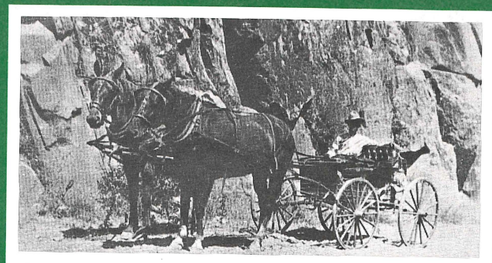
saloon forces. Two months later they were back with additional petitions, this time including propositions to raise the license to a prohibitive $500 per quarter, to close saloons Saturday night and all day Sunday, to remove stained glass doors and screens from saloon fronts so indoor activities could not be concealed, and to remove all chairs and card tables from the saloons, presumably so patrons would be too uncomfortable to stay long.

Such affrontery only aroused the liquor interests to new heights of resistance and further delayed the final showdown, which did not come until April 13, 1908, when the issue at last appeared on the ballot. Once given the chance to be heard, residents of Vacaville voted almost two to one to close the saloon doors. The vote was only a token of public expression and had no legal significance, but the trustees got the message. In a few weeks a prohibition ordinance had been drawn and passed, the date of January 1, 1909, being established as the effective date of the law.

The arrival of legal prohibition was anticlimactic as was to be expected, for by then most of the saloons had either closed their doors or converted to pool halls serving only soft drinks and cigars —at least over the counter. One drugstore dealer evidently misunderstood the ordinance, for he was arrested January 3 after selling a bottle of liquor to a Japanese man. Both client and druggist claimed it was for medicinal purposes, but no prescription was found. Three months later saloonkeepers made a last-ditch attempt to repeal the ordinance by arguing that local business had fallen off sharply as a result of the ban, but the citizenry turned down the argument.

When a straw vote was taken a year after prohibition took effect, the drys won again, 176 to 139. Although this was a much closer margin than their original victory, the prohibitionists still had complete control. They even prevented a vote on the crucial issue of offering a bar license as an inducement to attract a new hotel after the community's only hotel burned in 1909. Vacaville was officially dry, and dry it would remain until twenty-four years later.

Discussing the end of the "legal" traffic raises the question: how dry was Vacaville in fact? Pertinent records, of course, are almost nonexistent, but the sudden increase in traffic to nearby Elmira (wet until World War I) and the intermittent raids on local pool halls and restaurants (netting on occasion several hundred dollars worth of booze) suggest that Vacaville, like other dry towns, was dry in name only.



PART FOUR

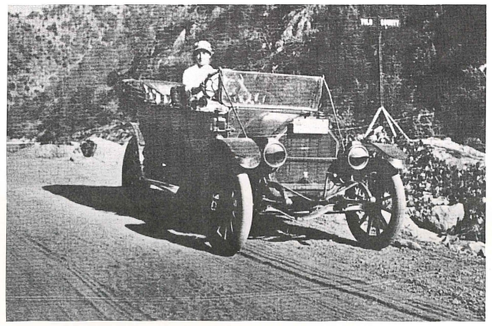
Between the Wars, 1918-1940

World War I was a watershed in the history of Vacaville. Rural isolation and unshakable confidence, two major prewar characteristics, both gave way in the turbulent period between the two world wars. National and international events, as well as new technologies and new ideas, permanently altered the character of rural American communities like Vacaville.

The forces of change pressed on Vacaville regardless of economic conditions. In the fabulous twenties, business consolidation and chain stores began to push aside independent local merchants. Freud, movies, and prohibition worked a morals revolution on young people. Automobiles and radio ended rural isolation. Rural schools started giving way to bigger, consolidated districts. Even local government got bigger if not necessarily better. Vacaville in 1926 became a sixth-class city with a city council instead of a board of trustees.

Change came even faster after 1929. Economic calamity forced unforseen alterations on the community and the land. Vacaville's faltering orchard business could not survive the Great Depression, and many of those whose lives and fortunes were invested in fruit lost everything. Lovely old orchards succumbed to bulldozers and neglect. Newcomers took over property that for generations had been held by pioneer families. Businesses folded or changed hands. Complacent workers agitated for better wages and working conditions. By World War II, when prosperity finally returned, Vacaville's roots in the past were nearly severed. But few looked backward, for exciting new changes were just around the corner. Vacaville's modern era was about to begin.

The Twenties in Vacaville



Two roadsigns greeted visitors to Vacaville in 1925. Erected by the Boosters Club on the main highway at each end of town, the circular landmarks, each ten feet in diameter, were financed by Shell Oil and bore the orange and black colors of the company. On each sign stood two proud grizzly bears on their hind legs. Surrounded by sprays of California poppies, they held between them a basket of fruit. Beneath the basket was a decorative ribbon bearing the slogan unanimously adopted by Boosters Club members two months before: "Eat Vacaville Fruits." As a final touch, the club added "Welcome to Vaca Valley—Vacaville Boosters' Association."

Such were the signs of the times. During the twenties boosterism ran wild in Vacaville and in other similar communities of Middle America. The climate of prosperity made the decade both garish and unquenchably optimistic. Boosters dominated the clubrooms and the luncheons, talking up business prospects and talking down the "knockers" who dared to speak critically. Vacaville boosters formally organized in 1922 to promote the town's "commercial, economic, civil and social welfare" as well as to encourage "cooperation and loyalty" among residents of the community. At the organizational meeting the seventy-five businessmen and farmers who attended "went home firmly convinced that a good start had been made in putting Vacaville on the map."

Four years later official and unofficial boosters came together to organize a second promotional club for the town, the Vacaville Exchange Club. The Boosters and Exchange clubs served as substitutes for the Vacaville Chamber of Commerce, first organized in 1913 but disbanded during World War I. In 1928 the two groups merged to reorganize the chamber, but it declined again in the late 1930s when the rival Merchants' Association was founded to give local boosters a shot in the arm. Finally in 1941 the Merchants' Association merged with the chamber. Since then the chamber has been in continuous operation.

The Automobile and Its Appurtenances

Vacaville boosters had plenty to talk about in the twenties. The town witnessed a growth of business that impressed even the most incorrigible "knockers." Automobile traffic accounted for most of this growth and led to business spinoffs in related fields.

As it did in other communities, the auto brought unforeseen changes to Vacaville's social and economic life. Even before the state highway commission in 1913 bowed to the lobbying efforts of Vacaville promoters and agreed to route the main San Francisco to Sacramento artery through town, the growth of auto traffic was affecting the community's development. In 1905 the town trustees, responding to complaints from irate teamsters and fruit shippers, passed Vacaville's first traffic ordinance. Designed

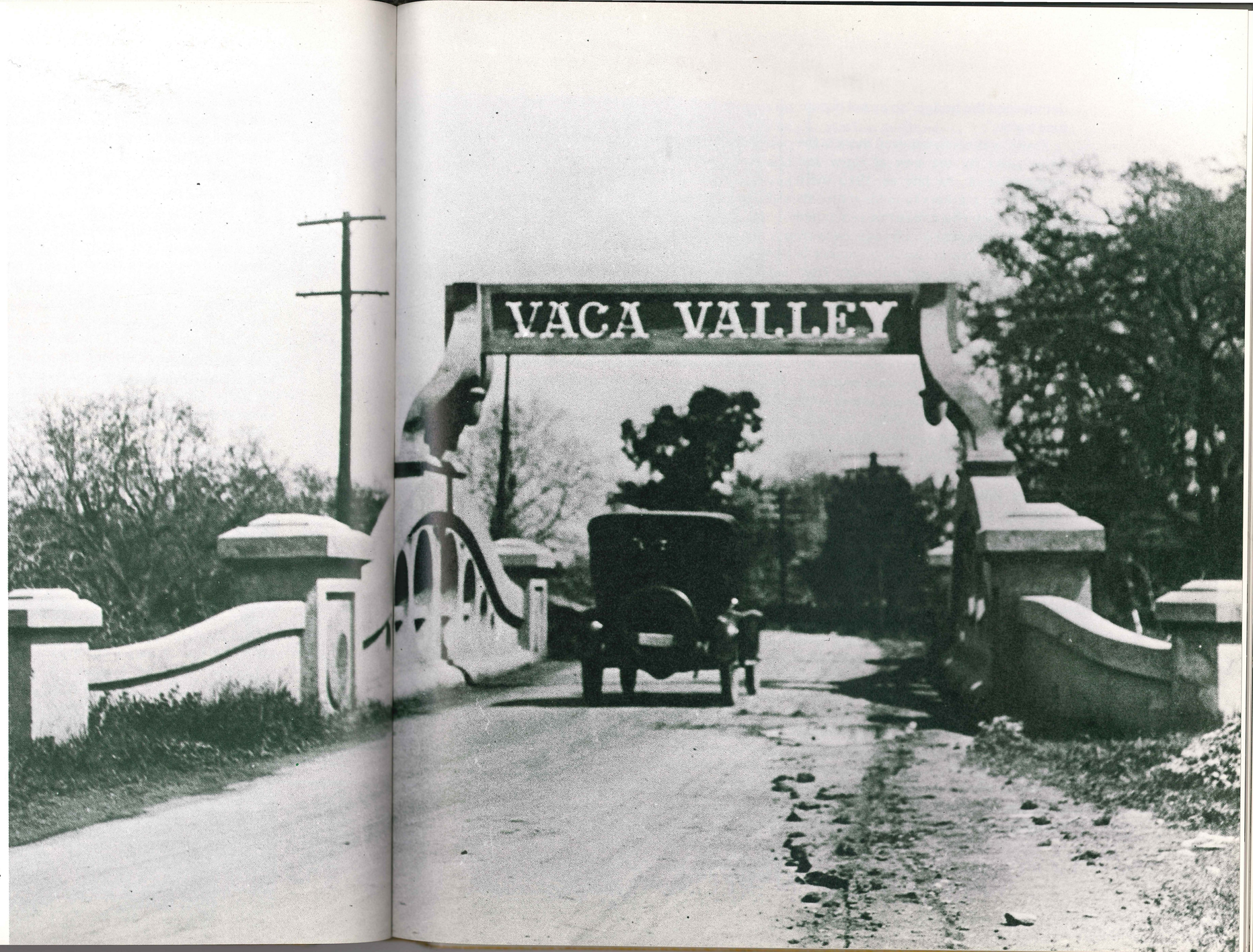
At the start of the auto age, Elmer J. "Whitey" Hilden and his hard-tired delivery truck were familiar local sights.

to prevent runaways during harvest season, it banned autos or any other noisy motor vehicles from Main Street during business hours, May through September. Two years later, with the number of locally owned autos estimated at sixteen or seventeen, a second ordinance limited all motor vehicles to ten miles per hour within the town limits and to half that speed when they were approaching an intersection.

Completion of the state highway brought a spectacular increase in Vacaville auto traffic. One garage owner in 1915 estimated that 100 cars per day passed through town, following a winding route that took them past the high school on the north side of Ulatis Creek, through the business district on Main Street, along Merchant Street to Alamo, around Wykoff's Hill to the Pleasant's Valley Road, and on through Lagoon Valley to Fairfield.

The heavy traffic pounded to pieces what was left of the old wooden bridges in the community. For replacements County Engineer Frank Steiger designed several handsome concrete structures. The Ulatis Creek bridge on Main Street was built in 1911, and it still stands today. For the new Alamo Creek bridge at the western entrance to town Steiger designed an archway emblazoned with the words "Vaca Valley." A landmark for tourists in the twenties, the Alamo arch stood until 1935, when the State Highway Department rerouted the road and

For two decades Frank Steiger's Alamo Creek bridge greeted Bay Area visitors.



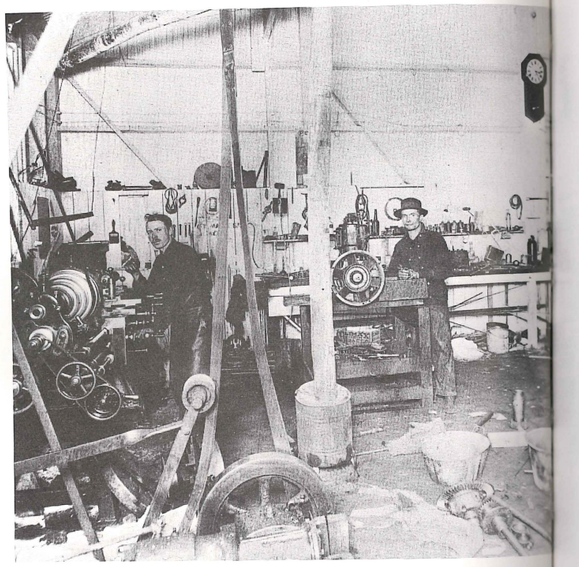
demolished the bridge "so as not to confuse traffic."

Traffic was confused even more in the early years by the lack of signs and improvements. As late as 1915 there were still no markers to guide motorists through town. One citizen that year urged the trustees to post a traffic sign because "this device was in use in a number of neighboring towns, and he thought Vacaville should also adopt the idea."

Off the main highway motorists had neither roadsigns nor surface improvements. County supervisors lacked money to construct the expensive concrete roads preferred by state engineers. County road crews spread gravel when staff and money permitted, but most back roads lacked even that thin veneer.

In 1920 one local motorist who had wisely purchased a house only one-quarter mile from the concrete state highway, complained bitterly about the condition of the county roads. In winter the route to Elmira, he said, was "absolutely impassable. I will defy the road man who has charge of that district to drive his machine down that road." The Winters road was no better. "I have seen dozens of machines hopelessly stuck there already this winter," he reported. County roads did not improve until asphalt, or oil macadam as it was then called, came into general use later in the decade. In the meantime horses had their last laugh hauling feckless "tin lizzies" out of the mud.

Autos also brought new industries and services to Vacaville. Fred L. Nay, an English Hills native with mechanical



Above: Vacaville's first Ford dealership. Below: Pausing for a photo in 1914 are Jimmy White (right) and an unidentified machinist in the well-equipped machine shop at the Vacaville Garage.

talent, opened one of the first garages on Dobbins Street before 1910. In 1911 he built the Nay Garage on Merchant Street, but later moved into the hardware and insurance business. In the thirties he was Vacaville's justice of the peace, an office he held until his death in 1942.

In 1912 another auto dealer got his start. Wiley S. Killingsworth, Jr., opened the Vacaville Garage Company on the corner of Main and Bernard Streets. Killingsworth also handled the Dodge dealership until 1918 when he sold out to Omer E. Alley and his brother R.J. The Alley brothers opened a Studebaker agency and handled most of the town's garage business. Two years later they set a record for fast service that is hard to beat even today. Receiving a rush order for parts not in stock, Omer called his brother in San Francisco. R.J. had taken up aviation, and he delivered the parts just an hour and twenty minutes after the first order, although the plane had to land at the Pacific Portland Cement Company's field south of town for lack of a local airport.

For oil and gas the Alleys and other retail dealers relied at first on intermittent deliveries from Bay Area distributors. In 1920 Standard Oil decided to locate a regional distribution center and substation in Vacaville. The work was completed two years later on a corner of the old Parker ranch at Mason and Stevenson Streets, the same site it occupies today. By that time motor traffic through Vaca Valley averaged 200,000 cars a month—a whopping 6,000 percent increase over 1915!

Russell Beelard launched his service station business in 1926 when he leased a Standard Oil Station on Merchant Street. "When we first started," he recalls, "all we had was a gas called Red Crown and those old hand pumps. You had a lever on the side that you turned to put in a quart or a gallon or two. The pump had white hoses that you had to scrub every day to keep clean. The ground was all covered with pea gravel. You had to rake it every day to keep it looking nice." He also remembers the gas wars of the late twenties that brought gas to as low as a nickel a gallon! In 1930 Beelard and Elmer Burton went into a partnership and purchased the old Vacaville Garage on Main Street. Al Klotz leased the shop and ran it until World War II, when the government bought most of the lathes, presses, metal saws, and other tools for the war effort.

Taxi service in the form of jitneys began in 1919. The next year one jitney owner, Joe Manuel, successfully appealed to the town trustees to stop collecting a license for his livery stable, which was down to one old dray, the solitary remnant of a passing age. Another jitney owner had his license revoked after running into a telephone pole while driving under the influence. His customer was even less lucky; his arm was crushed in the accident.

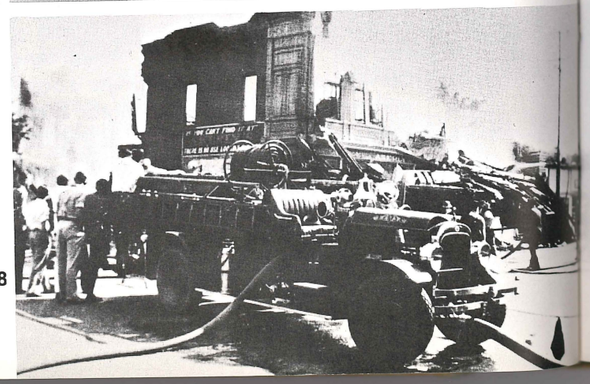
To apprehend drunk drivers and other traffic violators the town trustees in 1924

hired C.C. Griffith who was paid a percentage of the fines he collected. So vigorously did Vacaville's first traffic officer enforce the law that less than a month after his employment the California State Automobile Association reportedly threatened to boycott the town, charging it was a speed trap for unsuspecting motorists. AAA filed formal charges a year later, but Griffith stayed until the fall, when the trustees decided to dispense with an officer during the winter months. In 1926 they hired O.E. Alley on a salary of $200 per month rather than a commission.

Vacaville Hospitality

To accommodate the growing overnight traffic, the town trustees in 1921 made an auto camp out of the old labor camp on McClellan Street, site of the Women's Land Army headquarters during the war. A year earlier a more important facility, the Vacaville Hotel, opened for business on Merchant Street. A two-story frame structure with thirty-four rooms, a large lobby, and a dining room, the hotel climaxed a long effort by local promoters to provide the public accommodations that had been lacking since the Hotel Raleigh fire twelve years before. Stylishly covered with the cedar shakes popular at the time, and open to travelers as well as local people—who were encouraged to "come into the hotel in working clothes for their meals"—the hotel served the community for sixteen years. Known later as the Vacaville Inn, it changed managers several times, but provided accommodations and good meals until a fire gutted part of the building in 1936.

Two other popular downtown restaurants opened in the 1920s, both catering to the tourist trade and both lasting longer than the ill-fated Vacaville Inn. In 1922 Nestora Lyon and her sister Anita opened the Casa María on the old Blum property on Merchant Street. Named in honor of their mother, María Dolores Peña Lyon, whose romantic stories of her younger days in Lagoon Valley provided the community with a direct link to its Mexican heritage, the Casa María incorporated the Spanish theme in its gardens and general decor. The Lyon sisters shut down during the depression, and in 1940 they sold out to the Lucchesi family who



briefly operated the Casa María as an Italian restaurant.

The second popular downtown dining spot also had ethnic origins. In 1925 Sam Lum, whose father had been head gardener at Mills College before operating a ranch near Cantelow Grade, opened Gum Moon's Restaurant in Chinatown on the corner of Kendall and Dobbins across from the present fire house. Owned by a San Francisco corporation, the cafe served traditional Cantonese food at modest prices. The only Chinese restaurant in Vacaville for many years, it drew customers from as far away as Sacramento.

While his family manufactured noodles and bean sprouts in the cellar downstairs, Sam Lum grew many of his own vegetables on a ranch in Elmira, one of the first to specialize in commercial Oriental foods. The Lums operated the restaurant until 1958, when Sam Lum retired. The next proprietors soon sold out to a garage company, which eventually turned it over to the city. Today a parking lot occupies the site.

An important early office building, the Masonic building on North Main housed the phone company, Akerly's Store, and professional offices as well as a lodge hall. It burned to the ground in 1939. Fire also destroyed Hotel Vacaville, shown here in its prime.

The Nut Tree

Vacaville's most famous modern restaurant began in 1921 as a roadside fruit stand on the outskirts of town. Tending a tray of fresh fruit on a hot summer day under the black walnut tree planted by her grandfather Josiah Allison over sixty years before was not what Helen Power had in mind when she and her husband "Bunny" decided to enter the fruit business. But it seemed the only option left after a bad frost that spring wiped out much of the fruit, and a strong north wind later ruined more.

Helen, the youngest of the four daughters of Luther and Hester Harbison, met Edwin I. (Bunny) Power while both were attending the state agricultural college in Davis. Bunny was a resourceful young entrepreneur, the son of a San Jose artisan. With his father's help he created and sold cement and plaster decorative items for home and garden in Santa Clara Valley. After serving overseas in World War I he moved north and turned to agriculture, taking courses at Davis to supplement his practical education. Soon after they were married in 1920 the Powers leased a ten-acre ranch from Helen's mother and borrowed money to produce a crop. The disastrous frost struck a few months later.

According to her reminiscences, Helen had heard that almond growers in southern California were peddling nuts at

In 1921, "Bunny" Power (left) and his wife Helen join three customers for refreshments in front of the original Nut Tree—then a fruit stand.

roadside stands with considerable success, and she decided to try it herself with the few fruits that survived the frost. Her husband, dubious at first, placed a six-foot drying tray on sawhorses under the nut tree, decorated each end with fresh flowers, hoisted an American flag overhead, brought out a rocking chair and a copy of the **Saturday Evening Post** for his wife to read between customers, and put up a sign, "Figs for Sale." The stand opened for business July 3, 1921, and the next day holiday travelers bought $50 worth of fruit.

The first year they took in $1,505, and Bunny built a thatched roof shed to shelter the stand. Soon they opened a short order restaurant in the first permanent building, which they built with $1,500 borrowed from the Bank of Vacaville. Helen baked delicious homemade bread from recipes supplied by her mother, and Bunny packed dried fruit and nuts in miniature burlap bags.

In 1922 the Powers created the product that was to make the Nut Tree famous. Marketed in original papier-maché packages designed by Bunny and shaped into gold nuggets, oranges, and other California symbols, the candied and glazed fruit mixture known as "California Fruit Confection," was an almost instant success. Bunny developed the wholesale business by traveling the country with fancy samples, which he used to interest department stores. By the mid-1920s the Vacaville product was selling briskly at Robinson's in Los Angeles, Marshall Field in Chicago, Park and Tilford in New York, and the Emporium in San Francisco. To fill orders the Powers opened a packing house along the Southern Pacific tracks in 1924, and a papier-maché container factory two years later. During the holiday rush the owners employed dozens of local girls, and still the orders could not always be filled.

The restaurant kept pace with the glazed fruit business, expanding in variety, quality, popularity, and price. Once in the late twenties Leila McKevitt, a close friend of the Power family, asked Helen if she realized that a dinner meal at the Nut Tree was fifteen cents more than restaurants charged in the Central Valley. "Yes, Leila," was the reply, "but if I can have more people than I can take care of for a dollar, why should I reduce it to 85 cents?" According to Helen's son Robert, this quip reflected a deeper Power business philosophy: "Go broke setting your prices," which meant base your prices on realistic costs, not on what a competitor charged down the road. Considering the popularity of the Nut Tree today, neither costs nor competition hurt the growth of one of Vacaville's most important private enterprises.

Radio

Prosperity in the twenties came to other new businesses evolving out of the technological miracles that were rapidly transforming the character of American life. Neat M. Tate, a local orchardist, pioneered the radio market in Vacaville, more as a hobby than a business, by building and selling crystal sets to friends. Local commercial radio merchandising developed in 1922 when the Vaca Valley Radio Supply Company, later known as VESCO, opened a radio shop on Main Street. To promote sales of radio sets, it sponsored a weekly newspaper column that answered such thorny questions as "What is the difference between variometers and varicouplers?" It also manufactured a variety of radio receivers and other equipment, peddling these products nationwide through mail-order catalogs. VESCO stayed out of broadcasting, however. Vacaville listeners had to tune in KQW or other Bay Area stations.

The Business Consolidation Trend

While technological innovations provided part of the impetus for business growth in the twenties, another important stimulus came from the accelerated pace of consolidation that had begun years before in steel, oil, railroads, and other basic industries. Even as it reduced competition and threatened local ownership and control, business consolidation enormously increased the efficiency of production and contributed in large part to the decade's prosperity. Vacaville's business community followed a national trend, for corporate mergers affected practically every local industry.

The postwar trend toward consolidation in Vacaville began in 1919 when the Diamond Match Company absorbed Harry Chandler's Lumber and Supply yards in Vacaville, Winters, and Esparto. Harry purchased a fruit ranch but turned it over to a foreman in 1921 and entered the furniture business with his son Lloyd. A fourth generation of Chandlers runs the store today.

George P. Akerly was one of Vacaville's most prominent independent merchants in the 1920s. Russell Beelard, who went to work for Akerly at the tender age of seven and continued to work up to high school, remembers the wide variety of merchandise in Akerly's general store. "He had a big sign in front of the store," recalls Beelard. "'If you can't find it at Akerly's there's no use looking further.' He just had everything." The 1939 Masonic Building fire gutted the store soon after Akerly had sold out to A.A. Collier.

Other independent retail merchants soon found themselves in competition with chain stores like Purity and Sprouse-Reitz, both entering town in the next decade. Safeway arrived in 1939 after purchasing a key site on north Main Street that became vacant when the Masonic building burned. By World War II, except for the Oriental merchants, most local dealers in dry goods, groceries, and general merchandise had either quit or sold out to a chain.

PG&E

In the electric power business, consolidation brought to Vacaville the utility giant of northern California, Pacific Gas and Electric Company. Technically the Vacaville Water and Power Company remained independent until the late twenties, although PG&E supplied the energy for local distribution. In 1927 the huge company absorbed the local firm

and for the next thirty years controlled both power and water service in Vacaville.

Much more widely publicized than its 1927 takeover was PG&E's construction of the Vaca-Dixon Substation in 1922. By World War I the company had acquired most of the smaller private utilities north of the Tehatchapis and had greatly expanded its generating and transmitting capacity, but postwar growth in the larger urban centers exceeded the power supply and caused shortages in some areas by 1920. To meet these enormous new demands PG&E purchased the Mount Shasta Power Company in 1917 and launched the Pit River project. A bold plan for the day, it called for a series of hydroelectric dams on the Pit River and its tributaries, a 300-mile transmission line to San Francisco, and local feeders along the way. By 1921 the first power dam had been built and work was nearing completion on the line.

As part of the project, the company constructed a substation 3½ miles east of Vacaville to reduce the high-energy transmitting voltage for relay to the Bay Area. The first of its kind in the world, the million dollar structure, complete with a handsome brick and tile Spanish façade, a cooling pond and a fountain on the landscaped grounds, opened September 30, 1922, in an elaborate dedication ceremony witnessed by almost everyone in the community.

The biggest parade in the town's history, stretching nearly three miles along the state highway, brought dignitaries and townspeople to the substation grounds to hear a concert by the Sacramento Boys Band and an address by the president of the Sacramento Chamber of Commerce before the ribbons were cut and the switches turned. Two years later, after the third Pit River plant opened in another ceremony witnessed by 240 newsmen and engineers imported by the company, PG&E doubled the substation capacity to handle the increased load. As a significant technological achievement the substation made news, and Vacaville boosters welcomed the publicity even though they reluctantly had to share the glory with Dixon, which during construction insisted that the proposed name, "Vacaville Substation," be amended.

The Bank of Italy

Another California business giant arrived in 1923 to take over the Bank of Vacaville. Italian families in the English Hills had known Amadeo Peter Giannini since the late eighties when he used to visit the area on buying trips for his father-in-law's fruit and vegetable business in San Francisco. The Bank of Italy, which he founded in 1904, catered to Italian and other ethnic enclaves, but not until branch banking brought his banks closer to Vacaville did local Italians have much opportunity to do business with their old friend.

Of course ethnic minorities were not the only ones to benefit from the expansion of banking services. A banking innovator and pioneer, Giannini attracted smaller depositors and borrowers of all races and backgrounds by offering low-interest personal loans as small as $25 and real estate loans of less than $500.

He helped educate a large segment of California society in the utility and function of banks, and he instructed employees to serve the "little man" as graciously as the big depositors, even if they had to help illiterate clients fill out deposit and withdrawal slips.

Building on these innovations and pioneering the field of statewide branch banking, the Bank of Italy was phenomenally successful. By the end of 1922 it had sixty-one branch banks in forty-two communities from San Diego to Chico. With over $250 million in assets it was already far ahead of its rivals, and that was just the beginning. California farmers appreciated the strength and stability represented by all these financial resources, and they welcomed the bank's low-interest farm loan policies, which reduced local bank rates as much as 5 percent. When the bank announced it was entering Solano County by establishing a branch in Vacaville, local farmers greeted it warmly.

The bank Giannini took over in January 1923 was Vacaville's oldest and most prosperous. Two years before it had moved into a handsome new building on the southeast corner of Main and Elizabeth streets. The classical brick and terra cotta exterior, symbolic of stability and wealth, blended well with the interior furnishings of marble and oak. Bank officers Clement Hartley, E.R. Thurber, Edward J. Cox, and James R. McCrory were all sons of venerable farm families and had lived in the Vacaville area most of their lives. They stayed on when the Bank of Italy took over, for Giannini wisely retained as much of the hometown character of his branches as possible.

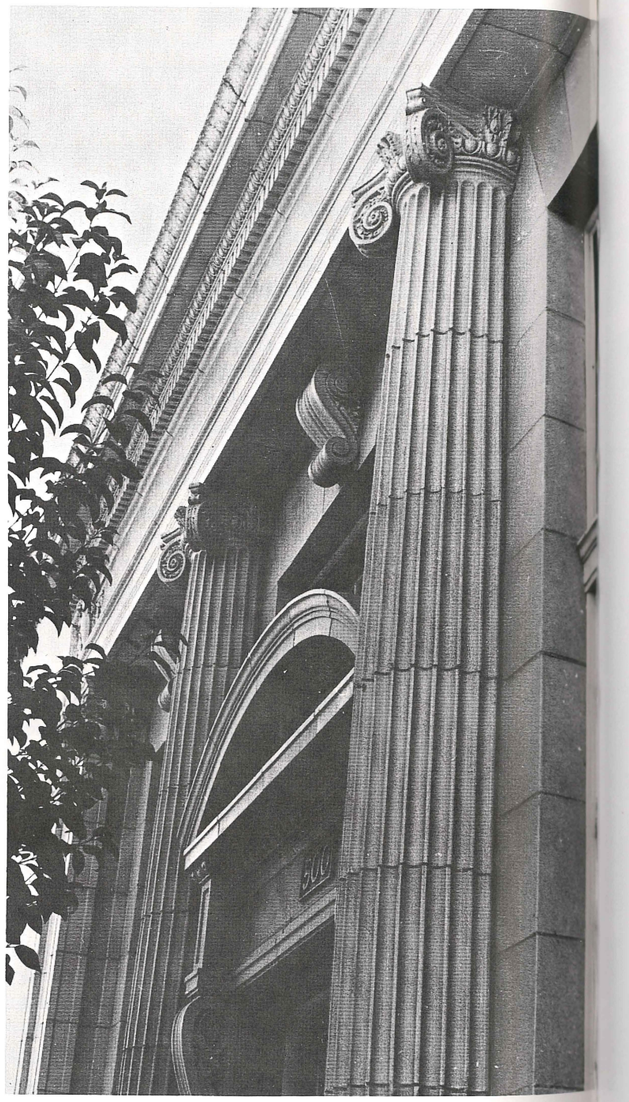
Although most of the staff stayed the same, bank policies changed after the takeover. Before 1923 the Bank of Vacaville had catered to a rather exclusive clientele of affluent farmers and businessmen. Small farmers often found the bank unsympathetic to their needs, as Alleyne Rogers, an early Browns Valley pioneer, discovered when he discussed the possibilities of a loan with Edward Fisher, one of the bank's first cashiers and loan officers. Annoyed by Fisher's procrastination, Rogers went instead to a friendly farmer who promptly granted the loan and literally dug up the cash from his "safe deposit box" buried in the back yard. After 1923 back yard depositories and disappointed potential borrowers both diminished as the new Vacaville branch of the Bank of Italy became more aggressive in seeking out smaller clients.

Equally important in attracting local customers were the impressive growth of its parent organization and the financial reputation of its leadership. While the Bank of Italy rose to third place in total assets nationally, locally the Vacaville branch far outpaced its rival, the First National Bank. The First National held its own for the first few years, but early in 1927 it suffered "severe losses in deposits," as Clement Hartley told his San Francisco supervisors, who by that time had expressed interest in absorbing the smaller bank.

Hartley's report indicated the need for caution, and Bank of Italy officers de-

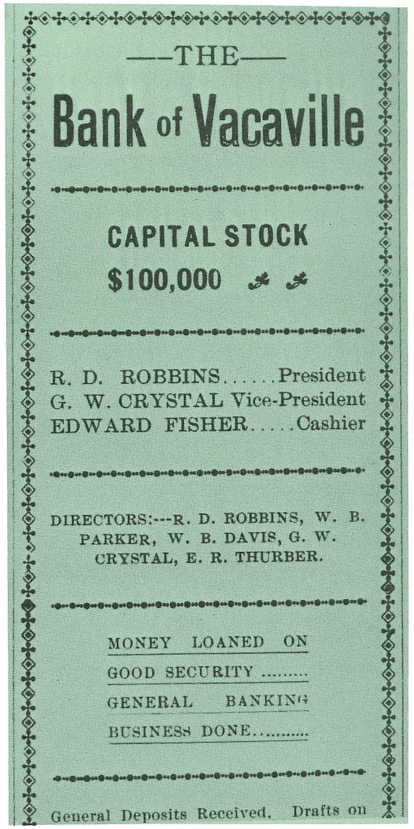
cided to put off negotiations for the time being. After the First National recovered they tried again. In the fall of 1929, just before the stock market crash, First National President W.B. Attkisson agreed to sell at a price of $310 per share, or 25 percent over the current market value of First National stock. Bank of Italy examiner Harry S. Bates thought the offer reasonable, but his superiors drew the limit at $285. The 1929 crash interrupted further discussion, and the depression ruined the bank financially. In a salvage operation that turned out to be more expensive than profitable, the Giannini interests finally took over what was left of the First National in 1932 and merged it with their own local institution, known after 1930 as the Bank of America, Vacaville Branch.

Neither Clement Hartley nor W.B. Attkisson were present when the two banks finally merged. Attkisson, a Missouri immigrant who had lived thirty-five years in Yuba County before coming to Vacaville in 1897, had been a butcher before turning to banking. He served as president of the First National for seven years before his death in January 1932 at the age of seventy-seven. Hartley died June 25, 1929, leaving a million-dollar estate, which was largely swallowed up in the financial debacle that began later that year. His death left bank leadership in the hands of Edward Joseph Cox, a Vacaville High School graduate who learned accounting while employed as a bookkeeper for the Vacaville Fruit Growers Association. Starting in the banking business as assistant cashier for the First



National in 1914, he joined the Bank of Vacaville five years later as cashier. When the Bank of Italy took over Cox became the first branch manager, and he held that position until his retirement in 1945.

The wealth and influence of the Bank of Vacaville are indicated by this 1903 ad and symbolized by its 1921 facade.



Consolidated Schools

The consolidation trends of the twenties did not stop with the business world. In the public schools, consolidation began in 1921 when voters in the Alamo, Lagoon, Peña, and Vacaville districts voted to merge. In a bond election the next year, voters of the new consolidated district authorized the school board to purchase adjacent land on the west side of Ulatis School, and the trustees obligingly closed Ulatis Street so the school district could have a solid block of property running from Ulatis School to McClellan Street. On the new site in 1924 contractors erected an L-shaped brick and tile building, with six rooms and a 400-seat auditorium. Children in the outlying districts now had to ride the school bus to town, but the advantages of centralization were obvious. Consolidated students had running water, good lighting, indoor plumbing, a school nurse, fewer grades per teacher, better and more varied athletic programs, and many more educational opportunities than

Ulatis Elementary School, about 1930

were available in rural schools. The initial merger did not include Browns Valley, Center, Cooper, Elmira, Oakdale, Peaceful Glen, Allendale, or Owen, but after World War II all those schools eventually joined the Vaca Valley Union District.

High school students in the outlying districts had been coming to town since the late 1890s. The high school building that George Sharpe completed in 1897 served their needs until the late twenties, when school officials held a bond election to raise money for new space. Voters turned down the first request, but in 1929 they approved a $62,000 bond issue. Builders went to work that summer on the new addition, a brick building erected on the west side of the original school. Containing five classrooms and a gym, the structure opened in 1930. By that time enrollment was 185, almost double the capacity of the old building.

Consolidated Churches

Consolidation also came to the Protestant churches after World War I. In the turbulent twenties the winds of change blew hard on the rural churches of America. New ideas and forms of recreation made severe inroads on church attendance. Sunday drives in a Model T replaced church services as the nation's favorite weekend pastime. Sigmund Freud and the new morality challenged basic religious beliefs, and H.L. Mencken heaped ridicule on the Puritan tradition. In 1924 the famous "monkey trial" at Dayton, Tennessee, in which fundamentalists fought modernists over the right to teach evolution in the public schools, illustrated how unsettling the times were for organized religion.

In Vacaville, the twenties brought hard times to nearly every church. Faced with declining memberships and rising debts, the Presbyterian, Christian, and Baptist congregations in the early twenties united to form the Vacaville Community Church. Ecumenical discussions had been underway since 1909 when both the Presbyterian and Christian churches were without pastors, and Baptist minister M.W. Coates divided his time between Vacaville and Winters. Ten years later the subject was brought up again by C.H. Forster, who had taken the Christian Church pulpit just before the war.

During the war Forster worked overseas as a Red Cross volunteer but returned to Vacaville in 1919. Under his leadership each congregation formed a planning committee to consider unification, but he returned to Red Cross work abroad before the plans could be finalized. His departure left the congregation without a pastor and divided by doctrinal controversies. In the meantime the Baptists, under Reverend A.C. Coats, and the Presbyterians, led by A.C. Fruhling, joined forces in common Sunday worship but retained separate church identities and properties. The Christians resolved their doctrinal problems and joined the others in 1921.

For a few years the Community Church operated with two pastors, but Coats departed in the late twenties, leaving the position to Fruhling. It was a difficult job, complicated not only by the theological problems inherent in trying to please

Once the home of St. Mary's Catholic Church, this building now houses the Vacaville Municipal Court. Despite remodeling it still retains much of the character of the original design.

three different denominations, but also by the economic realities of a declining salary. The 1924 church budget provided $2,500 for the pastor, but that figure diminished to $2,000 in 1928, $1,800 in 1931, and $1,200 a year later. At the bottom of the depression even the latter figure could not be met, but Fruhling survived the bad years and so did the Community Church. He retired in 1956, after a remarkable record of forty-three years in continuous service. Population growth revived the Protestant denominations after World War II, enabling the Baptists, Christians, and Presbyterians to form separate congregations once again.

In the twenties only the Catholics held their own in the secular tide that was diluting the fervor of Protestant fundamentalism. Reinforced by the influx of Spanish workers after 1910 and doctrinally immune from modernist heresies, the Catholic Church actually increased membership. Undaunted by a disastrous fire in 1925 that burned the structure to the ground, the congregation, led by Father Keller, raised $18,000—part of it during the depression—and rebuilt in 1930. In designing the new structure, architect George Rossi followed the venerable mission model. Built in cruciform using reinforced concrete with a heavy, beamed ceiling, a tiled roof, and a courtyard and fountain surrounded by an adobe wall, St. Mary's Church was a city landmark for thirty years. In the late 1950s the Catholics moved into a new church on Stimson Avenue. The old "mission" church is now the city's municipal court.

Prohibition

Declining church influence in the twenties contrasted with the increase in liquor traffic. Despite Prohibition, Vacaville drinkers had no difficulty locating a wine supplier or making their own. Even hard liquor could be found in practically every roadhouse and pool hall, although most of it was poor quality jackass brandy and whiskey produced in nearby stills. County District Attorney Brantley W. Dobbins made a valiant effort to enforce the law, but his raids on speakeasies and suspected distilleries netted only a few small operators, most of whom paid their fines and promptly went back to "business as usual."

Local police did not always take the problem seriously. A Chinese resident remembered inviting a friendly town marshal in for a drink one cold January night in Chinatown. Taking a healthy sip he exclaimed: 'Goddam that's good whiskey; where'd you get it?" "Old Birdies," replied the Chinese. "Well, next time you're down there get me a half a gallon, will ya?" asked the policeman. His friend promised that he would. Vacaville wets always said "they never minded prohibition in Vacaville because drinking was never prohibited."

Law officers occasionally uncovered bootleg evidence by accident, as town recorder R.H. Platt discovered after learning the details of a traffic accident in 1923. José Cruses was brought before Judge Platt on a charge of driving while intoxicated after his car struck one driven by Enos Goepfert on the corner of Main and Parker streets. The newspaper account of the incident, probably written by Platt, brought smiles even to teetotalers:

> Cruses appeared before Recorder Platt and made the contention that the failure of his brakes was responsible for the collision; that he was not only perfectly sober, but that he had always been sober, intended to be sober, and that he wouldn't know what hooch was if he happened to find some running wild on the range and unbranded. As the complaining witness was out of town the case was continued.
>
> Cruses also contended that a certain fluid, which seemed to have emanated from his car, and which spread over a considerable portion of Main Street, was not vino, but plain, ordinary ground-oil or kerosene, distilled by Mr. Rockefeller, with no intoxicating properties.
>
> Several witnesses interrogated by the Court at a subsequent date were willing to state that it had a distinctly vinous aroma; but as the vehicle of Cruses showed no traces of oil or grease, nor of wine either, for that matter, and as the witnesses quoted are supposed to be strictly prohibitionists, and therefore their knowledge of intoxicants may be limited, the Court is waiting to discover further evidence.

More serious was a 1921 car wreck that cost the life of a Vacaville Hotel waiter. The driver escaped serious injury, but officers found a bottle of wine in the car and arrested him. The wine they traced to a local resident who had several barrels in his basement and several more buried under the hay in his barn. Ten years later, in another case, Sheriff Jack Thornton uncovered one of the largest bootleg operations in county history while looking for some stolen sheep. He found six 500-gallon vats containing jackass brandy and fifty-eight 5-gallon barrels of wine. It took his men two hours to dump the containers and destroy the equipment.

Bootlegging carried on largely unchecked in the county—as it did elsewhere—until the nation finally repealed Prohibition in 1933. Its end was anticlimactic, for by that time many law enforcement officers had thrown up their hands, and all but a small handful of diehards agreed that the effort had done more harm than good. The "drys" meant well, but to strike down the bottle did not get at the root causes of alcohol abuse.

Entertainment

Vacaville residents didn't have to patronize speakeasies or bootleggers for entertainment in the twenties. The decade's biggest local attraction was the Clark Theater, built in 1926 at a cost of over $50,000. Proprietor William J. Clark spared no expense in constructing what was touted as one of the finest theaters in northern California. Equipped with dressing rooms for stage performers, air conditioning, and a magnificent theater pipe organ built by the William Wood Company of Portland, the new theater replaced the old Strand, which had operated several years in crowded quarters on the Barcar Block. After the "talkies" came into vogue, Clark remodeled in 1930 and reopened with the latest in sound equipment. The organ was eventually sold to the Community Church, which still uses the pipes.

Aside from the movies Vacaville denizens turned to sports and fraternal organizations during their leisure hours as they

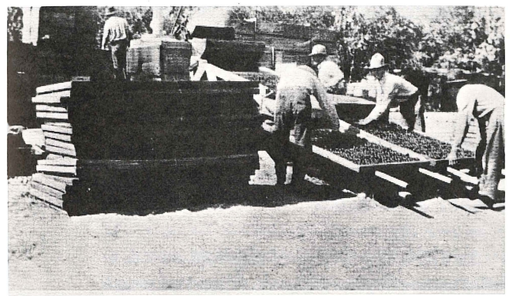
had in previous decades. Baseball remained a favorite outdoor sport, and lodge activities continued to attract the older generation. In 1919 town veterans organized the Rago-Christopher Post of the American Legion, named after two Vacaville boys killed in World War I.

The American Legion became an important social force in the twenties, as well as a recreational outlet. Legionnaires took the Boy Scouts under their wing and later helped sponsor a local boys' club. They also led the movement to "Americanize" the foreign element, and they were first in line to defend American values against all forms of subversion, real or imagined. Zealously patriotic, the legion served as the shock troops of democracy in the twenties and especially in the uncertain thirties. Some of their ideas and actions are criticized today, but the legionnaires were both potent and popular between the wars.

Conclusion

Urbanization brought major changes to Vacaville in the twenties. By 1929 automobiles had emancipated farm wives and teenagers. Boosterism and corporate growth had altered the town's business outlook. Church and school both had felt the impact of new urban values and ideas. No longer a town but a small city with a busy state highway, a unified school district, consolidated businesses, and an economy less dependent on agriculture than ever before, Vacaville approached the end of the decade with a much more diversified and sophisticated perspective than it had had ten years before. In numbers and basic values it was still a small town, but in the twenties it demonstrated its ability and willingness to adapt to changing circumstances. That pragmatic attitude would come in handy during the depression decade ahead.

The Decline of the Fruit Culture, 1920-1940



Drying prunes in Vaca Valley

Market Collapse

The collapse of Vacaville's fresh fruit market in the early thirties was only the climax of a frustrating decade of trouble for the fruit farmer. Fruit growers themselves created part of their problems by failing to unite in a common effort to keep quality high and production low, but many forces beyond the farmer's control also contributed to the decline. The net result was economic disaster, which in a few years practically terminated commercial production of fresh fruit in the once mighty Vacaville district.

Local growers had their first taste of trouble in the market slump following World War I. Overproduction and rising competition were the twin culprits. During the war, America had pulled out all stops to raise food for the Allies. With production at a maximum the war ended, leaving huge surpluses and an industry going at full speed. In addition, ex-soldiers and refugees on the continent went back to growing their own food, thus undercutting the European market for American goods. The consequent fall in farm prices struck hardest among Midwest grain and meat producers but reverberated in the fresh fruit industry on the West Coast. Vacaville shipments dropped to 650 cars in 1920, down from a high of over 1,200 cars in 1917. More than one local farmer ended the 1921 season with a net loss after shipping his fruit to eastern auctions only to have it sold below the cost of production.

Soil Exhaustion and Erosion

Soil exhaustion explains part of the economic troubles. After forty years of intensive agriculture, hillside topsoil had practically disappeared. Vacaville farmers had never caught on to the natural cycle of floods and drought in the area. In the late 1870s and early 1880s a wet cycle, during which rainfall averaged more than thirty inches a season, contributed to the belief that Vaca Valley agriculture needed no irrigation. The dry farming tradition was firmly established by the time the first major drought hit in the late 1890s.

In the meantime winter rains on the intensely cultivated hillsides had already taken a heavy toll of topsoil. Beginning in the late 1880s English Hills farmers, appalled by the huge gullies and washes that were carrying topsoil down the slopes at an estimated rate of one or two inches per year, hired Chinese laborers to terrace the most fertile areas. Varying from simple soil heaps to sandstone scallops fifteen feet high, terraces covered over three square miles of hillside farmland.

Despite such efforts the land continued to wash away, for the solution lay not in slowing the runoff, but in stopping it altogether by restoring deep-rooted ground cover to denuded hills. Since hill orchardists believed ground cover had to be eliminated to save what moisture there was for the fruit trees, the result was persistent annual loss of topsoil. By the time soil conservation programs were started in the 1930s most of it had disappeared.

Flooding

As the annual runoff increased because of the loss of hillside ground cover, the stream beds of both Alamo and Ulatis creeks deepened. By the 1890's the creek beds were over ten feet deep and getting deeper. Today, looking into the thirty-foot channel of Ulatis Creek as it passes through Vacaville, it is difficult to imagine early ranchers fording the stream with wagonloads of wheat on their way to the Suisun docks.

Deeper channels did not mean less danger from floods in wet years, however. A cloudburst in 1883 brought a rush of water down Ulatis Creek that washed tons of topsoil from the hills and filled John Wykoff's stable with two feet of muddy water. Although Vacaville itself was spared heavy flooding in 1907, disaster struck all around it: railroad traffic stopped; power poles toppled; downtown sections of Stockton, Oroville, and Sacramento were buried in mud; a number of Chinese drowned.

In 1931, 4½ inches of rain fell on Vacaville in twenty-four hours. Flood damage was slight everywhere except on Parker Street, where rushing water and debris plugged a culvert recently installed by the city. Water backed up until it was waist deep in the back yard of W.W. Trippe, who waded out at 3 a.m. to check on the Chinchilla rabbits he raised in hutches along the creek bank. He found sixty-three of them drowned. City fathers called it an act of God, but Trippe found more earthly culprits. He sued the city for $490.50, and won the case in the superior court.

Another flood occurred in 1940 when both Ulatis and Alamo creeks overflowed. Since then, however, check dams and diversion canals have tamed the streams, making future floods highly unlikely.

Drought

Drought, rather than flood, has been a more persistent source of trouble for Vacaville. As we have seen, the wet cycle during the early years of the fruit boom helped fix the image of Vacaville as a land of abundant rainfall and nonirrigated fruit. The image persisted into the 1890s, some Vacavillites taking the offensive to preach the doctrine of nonirrigated fruit and defend against detractors, especially those from rival irrigated fruit districts in Southern California. Editor McClain in 1883 likened nonirrigated fruit to mother's milk, which could be tapped the "natural way," while artificially watered fruit was like filtering milk through a rubber nipple.

Even nonirrigated fruit districts had to have a minimum of twenty-five to thirty inches of rainfall per season to sustain the trees and produce commercially marketable fruit, and Vacaville dry farmers got their comeuppance when a four-year drought struck in 1896. Within two years fruit production had dropped by more than half. The crisis dispelled old myths and prompted the first serious consideration of an irrigation project for the district.

If irrigation was to come to upper Solano, Putah Creek was the obvious source of water. Meandering in an easterly direction for 100 miles and draining four counties, the creek begins on the eastern slopes of Cobb Mountain in Lake County, cuts through the Coast Range at Putah Canyon, and bisects the Sacramento Valley on its way to the Sacramento River. In the fall of 1895 a Winters observer measured 1,900 inches of "waste" water flowing through the mouth of the canyon at Devil's Gate and proposed a series of dams and canals to be privately financed from water sales. The notion was premature; even at the height of the drought in 1899, private development of a Putah Creek irrigation system did not seem financially feasible. Most growers had no recourse but to wait out the drought, saving what fruit they could but doing well just to keep trees alive. The drought was over by the turn of the century, but it had a sobering effect on the entire district and demonstrated the vulnerability of nonirrigated fruit.

Ten years after the drought ended a Putah Creek irrigation project got beyond the talk stage when a private water company organized to irrigate 40,000 acres in Solano, Yolo, and Napa counties. Private enterprise still dominated California irrigation despite the growing recognition that large-scale reclamation projects required public support. The Reclamation Act of 1902, which had authorized federal construction and financing of water systems, was an indication of the changing pattern of water development in the West, but federal reclamation was still in its infancy when the Solano-Yolo Land and Water Company proposed building a 260-foot dam

at Devil's Gate, constructing irrigation canals and laterals, and financing the project through water sales in advance to potential users at an annual rate of $3.50 per acre.

Despite high-powered sales pitches and claims that water would increase production, raise land values by $200 an acre, bring in new settlers, and double or treble the business of nearby towns, landowners hesitated. The drought was only a memory by 1910, and Japanese tenant farmers had replaced many resident whites in the Vacaville district. Absentee landlords did not relish the thought of financing an expensive and long-range property improvement program that seemed more immediately beneficial to tenants than to owners. A year after incorporation the water company dissolved, suffering from financial frustration.

Three years later still another company, organized by a syndicate of San Francisco and eastern investors, purchased 100,000 acres in eastern Solano and proposed bringing Putah Creek water and small farmers to the site. It went bankrupt nine months later before a spadeful of dirt had been turned. By World War I Solano irrigation seemed almost as remote as it had thirty years before.

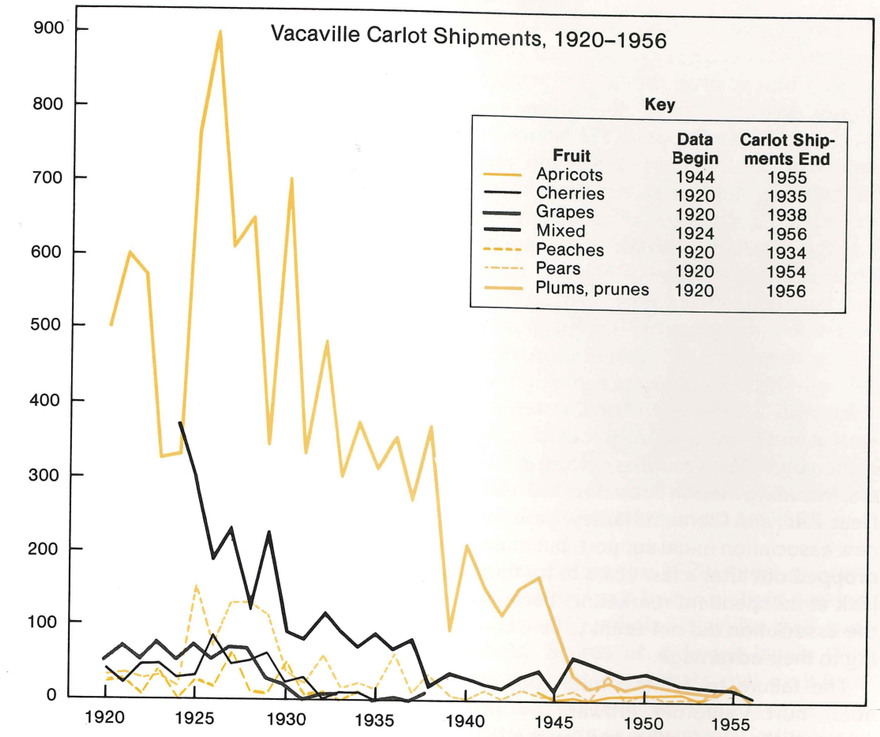
Competition from Irrigated Fruit

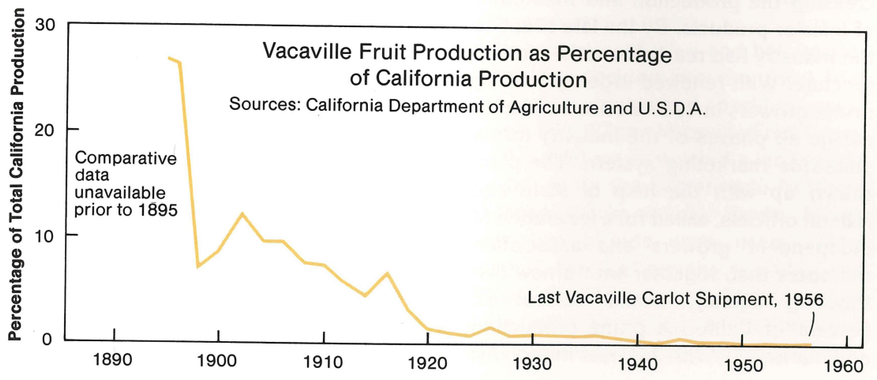
If Vacaville was slow to water its land, other fruit districts were not. After 1900 fruit production rose rapidly in the Central Valley where irrigation increased fruit size up to 50 percent. Diehards in Vacaville said irrigated fruit wouldn't sell, but consumer eye appeal was a better market test than taste or shipping quality. Eastern consumers liked the new fruit, and Vacaville's importance steadily declined as Central Valley growers planted thousands of acres of new orchards to meet the rising demand.

Competition not only hurt the local fruit trade but also accelerated the changes that were taking place in the industry. To meet the challenge from rival districts, most local growers resorted to specialization, pulling up old trees and converting either to early varieties of plums, which reached market ahead of the competition, or to prunes, which could be dried for later use.

To increase the size of their fruit, some Vaca Valley growers followed the lead of James H. Rogers, and drilled wells for supplemental water. However, groundwater supplies, lowered because the naked hills were no longer able to absorb sufficient rainfall, were not feasible for extensive irrigation, and only the most affluent growers could afford the expense of pumping what groundwater could be found to specialized crops, such as Burton prunes, that brought high prices.

By the 1920s, 75 percent of Vacaville's orchards had been converted to plums and prunes. Gone were the days when Vaca Valley produced almost every known variety of deciduous fruit. Cherries, peaches, grapes, apricots, pears—all dwindled to a small percentage of the total production, and as the twenties advanced they dropped even farther behind.





Organizing to Improve the Market

The postwar recession forced California growers to renew the struggle for market control. As related earlier, the fruit industry had begun to establish production and marketing standards before the war, but they broke down in the rush to meet wartime food shortages. After the armistice the California Prune and Apricot Growers' Association (CPAGA) led the reorganization efforts. A newly organized statewide marketing cooperative, the CPAGA preached the gospel of market control. Through intensive campaigning it brought 75 percent of the statewide apricot and prune acreage under its jurisdiction by 1919. A number of local growers, including Marion Brazelton, C.J. Uhl, Neat Tate, and Clement Hartley, gave the new association initial support, but many dropped out after a few years to try their luck at independent marketing, because the association did not seem to be working to their advantage.

The failure to achieve total cooperation hurt California growers by increasing the production and marketing of inferior products. By the late twenties the industry had reached another critical juncture. With renewed urgency leading prune growers in 1927 devised a plan to merge all phases of the industry into a statewide marketing system. The plan, drawn up with the help of state and federal officials, called for a federation of independent growers and association members that, together with a new distributing agency, would control 90 percent of California prune production and marketing. With this near monopoly, price and quality standards could be established for the entire prune industry.

Vacaville independents signed on immediately, but after a month of intensive effort the statewide promoters failed to meet the 90 percent quota. With long faces they announced the abandonment of efforts to maintain a high price level. Faced with a huge backlog of surplus prunes from the 1926 season, the California Prune and Apricot Growers' Association said it would now enter into free competition, slicing prices until everything was sold. The depression was still two years away, but the future already looked grim for the fruit industry.

Vacaville growers tried other ways to maximize profits and protect the industry in the twenties. In 1922, larger growers inaugurated the California Growers' and Shippers' Protective League to fight high freight rates and shipping problems in the East. By the next year nearly 85 percent of the deciduous growers in California had joined. Led by President Frank H. Buck, Jr., who was a lawyer in San Francisco and also controlled the Buck Company, the league won a number of battles with railroads and fruit brokers in the twenties. Buck's leadership won praise throughout the industry and built credits he would eventually draw on to launch a career in Congress.

Dried Fruit and Centralized Packing

In 1920, to make prune drying more efficient, J.N. Rogers installed the first fruit dehydrator in the district. A steel and concrete structure with an oil furnace that could dry six tons of fruit every

C.J. Uhl's 25-ton prune dehydrator, built in 1926. Basic Industries began using it in 1933.

twenty-four hours, the plant represented a substantial improvement over the sun-drying yards used by other growers. Following Rogers' lead Mrs. Alma Bowles set up a three-ton unit on her ranch in 1925, and C.J. Uhl in 1926 topped the field with a twenty-five-ton dehydrator managed by his son, Edwin H. Uhl. Located behind the old Dobbins home on Gibson Canyon Road (adjacent to the post office today), the Uhl drier was large enough to handle all the prunes in the district and then some.

Efficiency and standardization were key terms in the twenties, and progressive growers sought to apply them to the fruit industry wherever possible. Even though they failed to achieve statewide unity, their efforts led to a substantial change in local processing and distribution. Before the 1920s most growers packed their own fruit in orchard packing sheds and marketed it under their own labels. Scores of different labels thus flooded eastern markets, making it hard for brokers and buyers to determine either quality or consistency in the Vacaville product.

To reduce confusion and help standardize the packing process, local fruit companies centralized packing operations. In 1927 the Vacaville Fruit Growers Association completed a large packing house on the Sacramento Northern Railroad tracks along Davis Street. Only two brands were used, "Chief Solano" for the premium grades and "Pacer" for the seconds. Since most of the smaller Vacaville growers belonged to the association, the uniform pack and

the new grading and labeling standards improved Vacaville's market image and paid dividends in higher auction prices, at least until the early 1930s.

Vacaville's largest shipper, the Buck Company, built two packinghouses during the era. The first, completed early in 1919, was a 200-foot-long shed located on the Southern Pacific tracks along East Main Street. Nine years later the Southern Pacific erected a second Buck Company packinghouse, using plans designed by the company's district manager, Frank Thompson. The two-story frame structure had space for fifty-six packers and four graders on the main floor. A battery of nailers made boxes upstairs from "shook" stored in the basement, while loading crews wheeled crates into the refrigerator cars "spotted" on the double spur tracks.

The new packinghouse was a model of efficiency, but disaster ended its brief career. In 1930 it burned to the ground in a roaring fire of mysterious origins. Four years later, after the company had sold out to the Pacific Fruit Exchange, Buck's older packinghouse also burned in another fierce blaze. The two fires appeared to be coincidental.

Failure in the Orient

In the late twenties Vacaville teamed with other Solano County growers in an effort to open the Oriental market for California fruit. In September 1927 the **Silverguava** and the **Silver Belle**, sister ships of the Kerr Line, left San Francisco loaded with Bartlett pears, French and Burton prunes, Muscat grapes, and other Solano County fruit and vegetable products. Bound for Shanghai, Manila, and other Far Eastern ports, the two ships were equipped with the latest refrigeration equipment, including filtered air coolers for constant circulation and steady temperature. The fruit arrived in good condition, and other shipments soon followed.

At the end of a two-year program, however, officials from the University of California and the U.S. Department of Commerce jointly concluded that California fruit was not in great demand by Asians, who had plenty of local fruit. To create demand, said the experts, California growers would have to invest in an expensive and long-range advertising campaign. That was too much to ask in 1930. Asian markets did not open on a large scale until after World War II, and by that time it was far too late to help Solano County growers. Nothing, it seemed, could overcome the hard times that had visited the Vacaville fresh fruit district.

Loss of Local Control

If the twenties were bad for local fruit, the thirties were disastrous. Nationally the Great Depression began with the stock market crash of 1929, but agriculture had been in a tailspin since 1920. Most Vacaville fruitmen probably lost more money than they made in the twenties, although ironically 1929 was a reasonably good year because of severe northern California frosts, which ruined crops on the valley floors, including those in Vaca Valley. English Hills orchards, however, survived the frost, and prices

climbed because of the scarcity. All too soon it was over. Bumper crops the next year drove prices sharply downward, and by 1931 new competition from the southern San Joaquin Valley began to drive Vacaville fruit off the market.

In the mid-twenties Joseph DiGiorgio, an eastern fruit broker, acquired thousands of acres in what was once known as the "weed patch" district of Kern County. The weeds soon gave way to fruit trees, as DiGiorgio sunk dozens of wells and covered his lands with orchards. When DiGiorgio plums came into commercial production in the early thirties, they beat Vacaville plums to market by at least a week and were larger than Vacaville's finest. Moreover, DiGiorgio not only grew his own produce but also handled the shipping and the marketing. Outclassed by a larger product and a more efficient distribution system, Vacaville growers and shippers faced economic ruin.

The shippers were the first to feel the pinch, and they began liquidating within a year after DiGiorgio fruit hit the market. Frank McKevitt ended almost half a century of business by selling what was left of his shipping firm to the American Fruit Growers in February 1932. The Pioneer Fruit Company, one of the largest members of the California Fruit Exchange, was the next to fold. In August it filed for bankruptcy in San Francisco and shut down its agencies in eleven counties, including the one in Vacaville, which had been operating since 1918. Four months later DiGiorgio's Earl Fruit Company, the largest individual producer of deciduous fruits in the country, organized a pooling arrangement with the California Fruit Exchange, one of the country's largest grower cooperatives. Company spokesmen were not exaggerating when they announced that the pool had been formed "because of the present chaotic condition in all . . . phases of the California fresh deciduous fruit industry."

In January 1933, the end came for the Buck Company. Just before leaving for Washington to take his seat in Congress, Frank Buck announced that his company had been acquired by the Pacific Fruit Exchange, which would continue to handle the crops from Buck family orchards but would sell all other leased lands. The Buck Company's demise left only the Vacaville Fruit Growers Association and the Vacaville Fruit Company among the locally controlled shippers, and their days were also numbered. The Vacaville Fruit Company, managed by Clement Hartley, Jr., after his father's death in 1929, absorbed the Grower's Association after it ran into financial difficulties, and later the Hartley firm itself passed into other hands.

The rapid disappearance of locally controlled shipping companies did not mean the equally sudden end of fruit culture in Vacaville. Quitting business or turning it over to outsiders was much easier than liquidating a fruit orchard or terminating the lifelong career of a fruit farmer. In the depression the older growers had no recourse; they stayed on their ranches, producing and selling what they could even at a loss, since they had no other jobs and nowhere else to go. Desti-

tute, demoralized, and heavily in debt, small farmers eked out a marginal existence. Larger growers, of course, were hurt less because they had more resources to fall back on, but the depression played no favorites. In the fruit industry everyone suffered.

To ship their remaining fruit, growers turned to the larger firms that had replaced the local shippers. Other than name and head office location there was little overt change, since most of the new companies hired local personnel and used the same facilities. Frank McKevitt stayed on as agent for the American Fruit Growers. Howard Rogers, who had worked in Sebastopol as field representative for the Pacific Fruit Exchange, returned to Vacaville after his company absorbed the Buck firm and handled PFE's regional operations. Clement Hartley, Jr., became the local manager of the California Fruit Exhange.

Financial Help from the Government

But while the personnel merely changed hats, the operational policies of the new companies underwent more substantial changes as the depression deepened. Most companies refinanced reliable farmers whose debts carried over from previous years, but thousands of dollars of uncollectable debts were simply wiped from the books, and money for new crop loans shriveled to a fraction of the previous volume.

In the absence of local funds, federal agencies stepped in. The Reconstruction Finance Corporation and the Federal Intermediate Credit Bank at Berkeley loaned $3 million to the United Prune Growers, a statewide marketing agency organized in 1932 to bring all members of the industry together. With this federal money, secured by warehouse receipts on crops already harvested but unsold, the Prune Growers provided advance payments to members who would otherwise wait months before being paid.

The loan to the United Prune Growers eased the growers' cash flow problems, but it was not enough. In 1933 a new crop production loan association came into being. To finance their farming operations, farmers with good security could borrow money at 6 percent interest from local agencies underwritten by the Federal Land Bank. In Solano County, Clement Hartley, George Turner, E.R. Thurber, and Wood Young served as directors for the local association, and Frank Thompson became one of the land bank's field investigators after the Buck Company closed its doors. The Bank of America and its affiliates also stepped in to provide low-interest financial assistance to farmers during the depression. By the end of 1938 the Bank of America held crop-production loans of $33 million, or over 30 percent of the total held by all lending agencies in the state.

These efforts eased the financial crisis but also altered the nature of local farming, for the outsiders demanded cooperation and efficiency as the price of their aid. Many farmers for the first time went on strict budgets drawn up by bankers and credit managers, and others found themselves driven off marginal farms. The unprofitable orchards they left behind were uprooted and the land converted to pasture or left fallow.

Help for the Land: The CCC

Hard as it was to watch the deliberate destruction of landmark orchards, even more disheartening was the sight of neglected fruit trees dying by the thousands or hillside soil disappearing faster than ever down uncontrolled gullies after a rainstorm. Oldtimers who remembered the beauty of well-manicured orchards and fields must have cried as they witnessed the abandonment and decay of once prime orchard land, but they could do nothing as long as depression gripped the country. The land, like those living on it, needed help on a national scale.

In Vacaville no one knew that better than Walter W. Weir, a native son whose distinguished career as a government reclamation engineer and teacher at the University of California brought him to the attention of federal conservation officials in the early 1930s. Asked to aid in the selection of California sites needing immediate assistance, Weir gave high priority to the English Hills near his father's farm and recommended establishing a Civilian Conservation Corps

This building on Peaceful Glen Road was built in 1935 as a barracks for the Civilian Conservation Corps. "Camp Chester" closed in 1939.

(CCC) camp there. The United States Soil Conservation Service authorized the Vacaville camp after it received enthusiastic endorsements from the local chamber of commerce, the city council, and Frank H. Buck, Vacaville's new congressman.

Months of planning and preparation followed the initial announcement. It took more than half a year to select a site near Peaceful Glen School and construct four double barracks, a mess hall, a dispensary, and other buildings. Work crews were still putting on the final touches when the main body of 190 men, mostly from Pennsylvania, arrived October 26, 1935, to open Soil Conservation Service Camp No. 5, otherwise known as Camp Chester, the only CCC camp to be established in Solano County.

Among all the social experiments undertaken during the New Deal, the Civilian Conservation Corps was perhaps the most successful. As an employment program the corps took thousands of young men out of depressed urban areas and gave them meaningful work with reasonable pay in a healthy social environment. As a conservation movement the corps represented the first nationwide effort to rescue the country's grassland, forests, and farmlands from environmental decay. The Vacaville camp, like hundreds of others across the country, combined military discipline with vocational training to educate young

Encouraged by the Soil Conservation Service, farmers in the English Hills terraced many hillsides, to help prevent soil erosion.

Future Farmers from Vacaville High School inspect a CCC check dam, about 1938.

people in basic skills, while at the same time helping to restore the land and the economy.

The fact that many ex-corpsmen found ready employment in related fields attests to the soundness of underlying CCC objectives. One Vacaville man whose CCC training later came in handy was David McCready, whose family had moved to Vacaville in 1935 to escape the Dust Bowl. He joined the CCC in 1938 and worked on road construction and fire crews in the Sierras. After military service in the Pacific during World War II, he returned to Vacaville in 1945 and became a fireman at Travis Air Force Base. Since 1972 he has been Assistant Fire Warden for Solano County.

CCC efforts in the English Hills illustrate the Soil Conservation Service's practical approach to environmental conservation. Most of the field work was done under the direction of Louis F. Vaile, a Yale-trained engineer and surveyor who had built highways and railroads in Alaska before coming to Vacaville after World War I. In addition to his local duties he also served as technical engineer for CCC camps at Lompoc, Arroyo Grande, Watsonville, and Sebastopol. Under his supervision Camp Chester personnel installed 186 check dams, 14 water conservation dams, 148 pipeline and outlet structures, 57 miles of terraces, and nearly 45,000 lineal feet of diversion ditches.

Working with forty English Hills landowners under cooperative agreements, CCC recruits transplanted or planted over 100,000 trees for erosion control and seeded over 125,000 square yards of gully channels to permanent ground cover. Emphasizing again and again the harmful effects of intensive orchard culture on steep hillsides not protected by contour farming or terracing, conservation service officials urged hill farmers to convert old orchards to pasturelands before all the remaining topsoil was lost. One of the many orchards to convert was the old Hartley place. In 1938 a bulldozer began uprooting trees at the rate of 160 per hour. Over 300 acres were cleared in a few days for the new San Francisco owner, who had secured the property after the bank foreclosed.

Conclusion

Science as well as a failing economy thus dictated the end of fruit culture in the English Hills. By 1939, when Camp Chester closed, commercial fruit production in the hills had virtually ceased. Elsewhere the fruit culture decline was almost as drastic. At nearly every turn local growers faced production and marketing obstacles. Buckskin disease wiped out most of the remaining cherry orchards after 1930. High production costs and regional competition, especially from Winters, made Vacaville apricots unprofitable even before the 1930s. New government health standards hurt pear growers by adding expensive washing and wiping processes to the cost of production. New Deal farm legislation and marketing agreements after 1933 also hurt local growers, especially minimum size requirements which discriminated against the smaller, nonirrigated Vacaville product. Even the rise of chain stores had a negative effect on the fruit farmer. Chain store buyers in the 1930s began to dominate eastern fruit auctions, driving out the smaller independent wholesalers and purchasing entire trainloads of fruit at rock bottom prices. Above all was the new competition from the southern San Joaquin Valley, which by 1937 already produced more than a third of the total fresh fruit output for the state.

Vacaville's fruit industry could not survive the combined effects of these blows. Carlot shipping figures document the extent of decline in the thirties. From a high of 1,325 cars in 1925, Vacaville slid to a low of only 137 cars in 1939, or 10 percent of the previous decade's production. Some fruit varieties almost disappeared during the period. Vacaville stopped shipping carlot units of peaches in 1934, cherries a year later, and grapes in 1938. A few carlot shipments of pears, apricots, and mixed fruit continued until the fifties, but nowhere near as many as in earlier years. By the late thirties plums and prunes made up almost all of Vacaville's remaining commercial fruit production, and even those shipments skidded from a high of 900 cars in 1926 to less than 100 cars, consisting mostly of dried prunes, by 1939. Dried prune production rose briefly during World War II, but since the war the local fruit business has represented only a tiny fraction of the community's total economy.

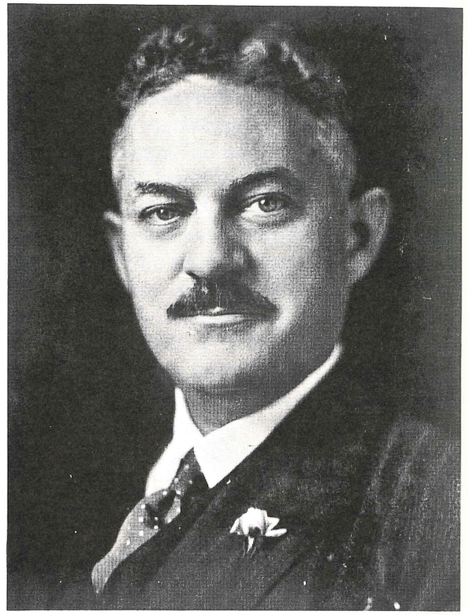
Today the fruit industry is little more than a memory in Vacaville. A few scattered orchards can still be found in Vaca Valley, but on the slopes of the English Hills, and in the Lagoon and Pleasants valleys, visitors see mostly the stumps and scars of a bygone era. Although time has erased most of the physical evidence, modern Vacaville residents should remember that for three-quarters of a century the fruit business was Vacaville's most important enterprise. It kept the town alive after the decline of grain production in the 1870s, and it provided the economic underpinnings for much of the town's basic development.

The Social Impact of the Depression

The stock market crash in 1929 signaled the beginning of the worst economic crisis in American history. It also touched off the nation's most serious social challenge. While the economy reeled from the combined effects of collapsing world markets, falling prices, and skyrocketing unemployment, people suffered unprecedented personal hardships. Never before had the nation witnessed poverty on such a massive scale. Millions of able-bodied Americans were reduced to beggary by apparently irresistible but only vaguely understood economic forces that swept away their life savings, threw them out of work, and even took away their homes.

What went wrong and why were questions everyone asked but few could answer. Politicians and business leaders at first talked of restoring "confidence" and urged people to have "faith," but destitute Americans at the grass roots and disillusioned intellectuals scoffed at such hollow phrases. They wanted solutions, not platitudes, and they helped elect a new president in 1932 who promised action.

The nature of free enterprise changed significantly as government under the New Deal stepped in with massive doses of federal money and a plethora of new agencies to try to cure the affliction, but the patient continued to suffer. Big government was a major consequence of the depression, but big government couldn't completely solve the problem. The economy did not fully recover until World War II renewed the demand for American goods and put people back to work.



Frank H. Buck, Jr., a Vacaville native, served ten years in Congress. A New Deal Democrat, he ably defended farm interests.

Facing the Depression before 1933

Vacaville followed these national trends almost to the letter during the depression decade. The decline of the local fruit industry mirrored a national crisis in agriculture that made rural poverty one of the most severe and perplexing problems of the era. Like the national majority, Vacaville residents in 1932 expressed their disillusionment with the tiresome rhetoric of conservative politicians and overwhelmingly voted for change. In contrast to 1928, when they gave Hoover 51 percent more votes than Al Smith, in 1932 they chose Roosevelt by more than a two-to-one margin. They also picked Democrats for all major state and national offices. Frank Buck, the new congressman, went on to become an important ally of the Roosevelt administration and a leading spokesman for the California farmer.

The depression was more than three years old when Roosevelt and other New Deal Democrats took office. Hoover's administration had fought the depression in novel ways, but most Americans received little relief from such agencies as the Reconstruction Finance Corporation, which did more to save businesses from bankruptcy than to aid people directly.

In the absence of direct federal relief before 1933, state and local agencies did what they could, but their funds were soon exhausted, and the tax base fell so low that even normal public services had to be curtailed. In 1931 the Vacaville City Council cut the salaries of the city attorney to $15 per month, the traffic officer to $150, and the street superintendent to $100. A month later it further reduced the attorney's salary to a meager $5, but it raised Traffic Officer Alley's pay to $175 after he agreed to equip and maintain his own patrol car. The next year the council consolidated the positions of traffic officer and police chief, giving Alley the combined post at a salary of $150 a month. Except for a brief interim in 1940, Alley held the office until 1947. At the same time he also served as health officer and fire chief.

Private Charity

In lieu of government assistance, needy families in Vacaville turned to private charities. Members of the local chapter of the Red Cross rolled up their collective sleeves at the beginning of the depression to gather and distribute clothing, food, and bedding. They also found part-time jobs for unemployed fathers. Local hardship cases made Leila McKevitt and her staff all the more determined to help. For instance, they located jobs for both husband and wife of a family of ten who had lived on four dollars' worth of food for two weeks. For another family of seven they furnished milk and a part-time job to the father. All the children were school age, but one was recovering from an operation, another was ill, and all were suffering from malnutrition.

The Junior Red Cross, made up of students from Vacaville schools, also pitched in. Under the direction of Mrs. Louis Vaile, they brightened up the Christmas of more than one local family with food packages and toys. Some of those needy families may have included teachers, for in 1933 the Vacaville School Board, to save money, fired all its probationary teachers and the next year lowered the salaries of the remaining staff.

A second privately funded relief agency with considerable impact in the early days of the depression was the Community Chest. Organized nationally in the fall of 1931, it rendered valuable assistance to many Vacaville families

Vera and Clyde Fadley, both from pioneer Vacaville families, worked in the fruit during the depression years. Married in 1933, they lived in "a little shanty" on Pete Miller's ranch which Vera improved by putting cheesecloth on the ceiling to hide the rafters. She used wrapping paper to cover the cracks in the walls. Later the Fadleys moved into a larger building known as the "Chinee house" on Ned Thurber's Cantelow Grade ranch. It had a bigger kitchen, but neither bathroom nor electricity. During these lean years they found work on fruit ranches whenever they could, but money was so scarce they supplemented their diet with wild jackrabbits, squirrels, and an occasional deer. Vera shot one out of season while she was eight months pregnant; as she recalls, "we had to have food." They moved into a house on the Chandler ranch just before World War II, but early in 1942 it burned to the ground. "At the time," said Vera, "we had four kids and no insurance. Everything was gone." Hard times softened a little during the war, but as fruit and farm laborers they moved three more times. Finally settling on the James H. Rogers' ranch, they lived there thirty years until a housing development uprooted them once again. Strong in spirit and proud of Vacaville's past despite their personal setbacks, the Fadleys now work with the local Heritage Council.

through its local chapter headed by William L. Bradley. In addition to collecting and distributing food and clothing, it held gala fund-raisers and used the money to pay wages at a rate of two dollars per day for various community work projects. The clothing committee alone in the first two months of its existence came to the aid of 127 people, mostly children. Over the next year and a half, with some county assistance, Community Chest distributed food to 245 local families, clothed 250, and paid out over $2,000 in wages for such things as landscaping the high school grounds, laying storm sewers, removing dead trees from Ulatis Creek, repairing sidewalks, sawing wood, and fixing the culvert that had caused a 1931 flood.

Government Assistance: the New Deal

Public relief on a more massive scale began during the first hundred days of the New Deal, when Congress passed a series of bills opening the federal treasury to the indigent and the unemployed. Federal relief differed from private charities more in volume than in form. For example, under the Civil Works Administration, unemployed Solano County men improved the Mix Canyon road and expanded the Benicia Arsenal. In its first week of operation it employed 685 men at a cost of $9,350.

The Federal Emergency Relief Administration, working through its state affiliate, the State Emergency Relief Administration, was more diverse. In the first six months of 1935, it distributed all kinds of necessities, from 1,186 sheets to 590 shadfish. Its workers also expanded the stone retaining wall in front of the high school, built an addition onto the Vaca Valley Grammar School, graded the grounds of all the schools, dug ditches, paved roads, and even made clothing and bedding for needy families. Public agencies did not eliminate the need for private charities, however. Both the Red Cross and the Community Chest coordinated their relief efforts with the government after 1933, and even the welfare section of the Saturday Club continued to can goods and gather clothes for local children.

Reform: The Townsend Plan and Other Schemes

Temporary jobs and emergency rations helped relieve the worst hardship cases, but stopgap measures were not enough for many Americans; they demanded that government do more to protect the poor, the elderly, and the infirm. Indeed, the search for solutions to poverty and related ills was a central theme of the thirties. During the decade Americans explored almost every conceivable political and economic notion. The Roosevelt administration tried to steer a middle course, but the Social Security program it eventually adopted was too limited to satisfy the leading reformers.

California was a hotbed of social activism in the thirties, and Vacaville found itself caught up in the ferment like most other California communities. Although local residents shied away from the socialist notions of Upton Sinclair and his End Poverty in California campaign of 1934, they were more sympathetic to a

plan formulated by a retired Long Beach physician. The Townsend Old Age Pension Plan was a deceptively simple panacea that offered solutions to both poverty and unemployment.

With money raised from a 2 percent national sales tax, Townsend Plan advocates proposed to pay $200 a month to all citizens over age sixty if they retired from work and spent the money in 30 days. Pensioning the elderly, taking them off the labor market and forcing money to circulate, said the Townsendites, would end poverty, reduce unemployment, and get the economy moving again. The plan was almost universally condemned by economists and business and government leaders, but almost overnight the Townsend movement became a national phenomenon. Townsend clubs sprang up all over the country, and by 1935 more than five million Americans had joined.

In Vacaville the principal spokesman for the Townsend Plan was Walter Schaefer, a leading merchant who had arrived in 1908 to open a men's clothing store. In 1917 he expanded by absorbing E.C. Crystal's "Big Country Store" on Main Street, and for the next quarter century he handled a large share of the dry goods business in town. The Townsend Plan appealed to his humanitarian sensibilities, and he enthusiastically embraced the cause.

After founding the Townsend Club of Vacaville early in 1935, Schaefer worked hard to secure the endorsement of Congressman Buck for the plan. Buck showed little sympathy, however, and the Townsendites in the Third Congressional District tried to oust him in 1936. They endorsed Sheridan Downey, Upton Sinclair's running mate in 1934, but even Downey's personal appearance in Vacaville during the primary campaign failed to win away many Buck supporters. Buck easily won the primary, but Schaefer refused to give up. He entered the race himself as a write-in candidate, perhaps more in protest against Buck's intransigence than in hopes of victory. At the November election Schaefer received 114 Vacaville votes—hardly a mandate—but still he did not lose his enthusiasm. He continued to tour the district regularly, addressing Townsend rallies and expressing confidence in ultimate victory. After all, he told one Stockton group, it took twenty-five years to get the pure food and drug laws passed.

In the late thirties Vacaville was introduced to another panacea even more dubious than the Townsend Plan. Known originally as Thirty Dollars Every Thursday, the newspapers soon began referring to it as the Ham and Eggs Plan after one supporter vowed that before the next election it would become as familiar to California voters as ham and eggs. Unlike the Townsend proposal, the new plan combined the hope of a pension with the clamor for property tax relief. It called for the distribution of thirty dollars in state warrants every Thursday to every person over fifty years of age. The warrants were to be used to pay taxes and to be financed by a 3 percent gross income tax.

The scheme was roundly condemned

by financial experts, but it came before California voters on two separate ballot initiatives. R.C. Gray, businessman and former member of the city council, was the Vacaville representative for the Ham and Eggs Plan. He secured over 600 local signatures to help qualify the initiatives, but each time they lost at the general elections. The failure of both the Townsend and the Ham and Eggs plans brought an end to the search for poverty panaceas, at least for the next two decades. World War II took American minds off domestic problems, and the question of poverty did not become a national issue again until Lyndon Johnson tackled it in the 1960s.

Farm Labor Unionism: the Vacaville Riots

Farm labor unionism, rather than poverty, was the underlying issue that touched off Vacaville's most dangerous public controversy in the early thirties. What has come to be known as the Vacaville Riots began with a strike by some 300 resident Spanish pruners against the area's three largest growers, Frank Buck, Edwin Uhl, and Clement Hartley. Even today the emotions aroused on both sides have not completely cooled, for before the strike was over it had been almost completely overshadowed by a larger ideological conflict that had its roots in Communist party efforts to organize California farm labor. Vacaville proved to be a testing ground for Communist organizers, and their ability to hold out for two months against nearly impossible odds provided the impetus for a major farm labor organizing campaign that led to larger and more violent strikes such as the Hayward pea pickers' strike, a strike by Santa Clara Valley cherry workers, and a cotton strike in southern San Joaquin Valley.

In the Vacaville strike, the communist issue made it impossible to separate the basic bread and butter demands of the Spanish pruners from the ideological battles between communism and capitalism. The pruners welcomed the assistance of the Communists, but they were more interested in securing higher wages and better working conditions than in listening to ideological harangues against the capitalist system. The Communists themselves had given up trying to win immediate converts to communism; by the early 1930s their principal objective was to build a solid workers' movement that could eventually become the launching pad for an assault on capitalism. But Communist involvement in the local wage dispute poisoned the atmosphere and prolonged the conflict.

To crystallize the worker's movement on the west coast, Communist party leaders in 1930 had organized the Agricultural Workers Industrial Union (AWIU). By that time Vacaville had a sizable Spanish colony; half of them worked as farm laborers and the rest were small ranch owners, tenant ranchers, and businessmen. They were talented, vocal, well organized, and generally well liked by the rest of the community. To keep alive their language and traditions, the Spanish in 1926 had established the Unión Española de Vacaville, a Spanish society that

met in a lodge hall that still stands southeast of Main Street.

Spanish pruners were so proficient that by the early thirties they had practically taken over the pruning phase of the fruit industry, at least in the larger local orchards. It was natural for Communists in 1932 to look on these Spanish pruners as ripe for organizing. Younger Spaniards were particularly receptive, for they were unhappy with menial orchard work and the low living standards of their parents. They welcomed the AWIU organizing committee when it came to town, and about thirty became charter members of the new Vacaville AWIU local that was founded in the late summer of 1932. Many of their parents soon joined. At the time of the strike, about 300 Vacaville residents belonged to the union. Almost all were Spanish, although some Filipinos also joined.

The strike began on a Monday morning late in November when pruners failed to report for work on the Uhl and Hartley properties and set up picket lines at the Buck orchards. Frank Buck's congressional election helped precipitate the strike, for rumors floated about that Buck had reneged on a promise made during the campaign to raise the wages of his pruners from the prevailing $1.25 per day to $2.50 if they would vote for him. Buck denied making any such promise, but the rumors were a pretext for action.

From the beginning the strikers were militantly aggressive. Whipped up by inflammatory speeches, they tried to intimidate the growers with verbal abuse and threats of violence, but such tactics only angered their opponents, who vowed never to give in. Most residents of the town, and all the county officials, backed the growers, who saw the strike as an attempt to bankrupt them and ruin what was left of the fruit industry. With both sides refusing to negotiate, the strikers settled in for a long siege. They set up barricades to halt growers' trucks, and when police tried to arrest the ringleaders they were surrounded by angry strikers and their women who pushed and shoved until the leaders escaped. On the other side, the growers, led by Frank Thompson, district superintendent of the Buck Company, and Ed Uhl, organized convoys of nonunion workers to cross the picket lines. In such an atmosphere violence was inevitable.

Determined to "bring the thing to a head," as Thompson later remembered, on November 25 he and Uhl, accompanied by Constable Stadtfeld, escorted a truckload of nonunion workers out to the Sousa ranch, one of the Buck Company's leased orchards in Brown's Valley. At the entrance they were stopped by an angry crowd of men and women. Rocks and bricks soon started flying. One man was stabbed in the arm; another was severely cut on the head with a pair of pruning shears; and others were kicked and bruised. Stadtfeld took a blow to the head that nearly severed his ear. He was 70 years old by then, still a giant but past his prime. The injury dazed him but he never fell. Some claim he suffered permanent brain damage and was never the same afterward, but he kept working for almost a month. His career ended after he fractured a hip in a barn accident just before Christmas, but he lived for another nineteen years.

The Sousa ranch incident kept Vacaville in turmoil for a week. Strikers marched through town shouting defiance and threatening more violence. City and county law officers deputized dozens of local orchard owners and their friends and gave the leading growers blanket authority to carry guns for protection. Residents organized a Vaca Valley Citizens Committee to Protest Communism, and on Thursday, December 1, they held a rally in front of the library. The main speaker, Reverend Fruhling, blasted the "menace which threatens property and even lives." Addressing the strikers, he said they had been duped by the Reds. "You have already lost hundreds of dollars in wages and stand to lose your jobs permanently. Your leaders don't care what you get—they are simply using you." He closed his address with a rousing appeal to meet the Communist menace "in the good old-fashioned American way." Judge Ball of Winters issued a similar warning in a follow-up address. "If necessary," he concluded, "we can adopt the same American system as is used south of the Mason-Dixon line." These were calls for vigilante action, and they did not go unheeded.

Three days later it was the strikers' turn to demonstrate. From strike headquarters Saturday afternoon came broadsides calling for a rally the following day at the lot across the street from the library. Hearing the news, city officials dispatched Constable Stadtfeld to the strikers' meeting hall. He warned them that the city stood ready to enforce an old ordinance against gathering or marching in the streets without a permit. The threat of arrest only provoked the strikers. Unanimously they voted to hold the meeting, anticipating a confrontation that would advertize the workers' plight and the arbitrary use of police authority.

On Sunday afternoon, December 4, both the strikers and their opponents were out in force. A crowd of about 300 strikers and their families, waving banners and shouting strike slogans, marched down Main Street toward the library. There they listened to speeches from both local leaders and AWIU delegates from Sacramento who had driven in for the occasion. As soon as the speeches ended the city officers and deputized orchard owners moved in. They arrested fifteen of the leaders, including one woman, and marched them off to the city jail. Most went willingly, although one deputy had to call for help from the sidelines before his reluctant captive was subdued.

Up to that time the authorities had been careful to stay within the law, but the strikers' open defiance and the public clamor for action against outside troublemakers contributed to a vigilante atmosphere that affected both city and county officials. They quietly agreed to cooperate with a band of about fifty orchard owners and their friends who were determined to teach the Communist agitators a lesson. To avoid any further complications with the local strike leaders, whom the owners continued to

believe were merely pawns of the Communists, officials transferred them to the county jail at Fairfield, along with the lone woman prisoner and a couple of other outsiders. Then at midnight, while the jailor was "out for coffee," the Vacaville vigilantes went to work.

Wearing loose coveralls and slouch hats, the vigilantes entered the jail with a key that a local official had conveniently dropped earlier that afternoon, and hauled out the terrified prisoners. Only six remained, all outsiders and members of the Agricultural Workers Industrial Union. Escorted to waiting cars, whose license plates were turned up to make identification harder, the prisoners were blindfolded and taken on what some of them must have felt was their last ride.

It was a foggy night, made to order for stealth, with a full moon casting sufficient light to make headlights unnecessary. As the convoy neared Elmira a lookout stopped the lead car and reported that two newsmen from the **Sacramento Bee** had gotten wind of the proceedings and had been trailing along behind. The vigilante leader, equal to the occasion, led the cars on a wild goose chase over back country roads that got rid of any unwanted observers and eventually brought the caravan to a deserted slough on the Sacramento River near Maine Prairie.

Some of the prisoners were pleading for their lives by that time, but the vigilantes did not plan a necktie party. Forced to shout "down with Communism" while beaten with harness straps especially prepared for the occasion, the prisoners were then stripped and smeared with red paint on their heads, chests, and genitals. The vigilantes finally turned them loose but warned them never to return to Vacaville.

The midnight ride triggered a response the vigilantes hadn't bargained for. Outraged by the incident, labor leaders from coast to coast demanded action against the vigilantes. Vacaville mayor C.J. Uhl received some 300 hostile telegrams, and his son Ed also got some threatening mail. Both Ed and Frank Thompson carried guns for several months after County Sheriff Jack Thornton warned that their enemies had sworn vengeance against them.

Outwardly nearly everyone condemned the kidnapping. Even Frank Buck, whose orchards had been the scene of the opening strike, issued a statement deploring the vigilante action "as constituting an offense as insupportable as the burning of residences and farm properties and threats against life charged against leaders of recent disorders here." But pious public statements were not accompanied by much action. Pressured by state authorities, Sheriff Thornton insisted he was doing all he could to investigate the case and identify the culprits, but no one knew anything about them. Vacaville Police Chief Alley told reporters he had no idea how the vigilantes entered the jail, but it must have been with an old key that had never been accounted for.

A militant labor defense committee demanded a grand jury investigation, but a more moderate group of labor leaders

from the Sacramento Federated Trades Council sent their own team of investigators to town. Their report reviewed the entire affair from the beginning of the strike. The union officials sympathized with the workers but said farmers could not afford to pay higher wages. They blamed outside agitators for inciting the local strikers, but they also condemned the vigilantes. They found no evidence of a police coverup: "the officers have made an honest effort to find out the identity of the mob members," they reported, "although without success thus far." When the Vacaville AWIU members read the Sacramento report, they said it was a whitewash by "mis-leaders of labor." Nonunion people, however, seemed to accept the report as a fair assessment of the situation.

For more than a week after the Maine Prairie hazing, Vacaville residents feared an attempt would be made to retaliate. They armed accordingly. The town bristled with guns, and rumors spread that a Sacramento mob was preparing to march to Vacaville and burn the town. Hellen Davis remembers packing a shotgun while she pruned her orchard. At night she came to town and slept with a rifle beside her in a building she owned, determined to protect it from would-be arsonists.

Although the Sacramento mob never materialized, about twenty-five members of the San Francisco Workers' Ex-Service Men's League and the Berkeley National Students' League arrived December 14 to hold a parade and street rally. They were met at the Ulatis Creek Bridge by a

NTY, CALIFORNIA— TUESDAY, DECEMBER 6, 1932 Twenty-four Pages No. 51

ECONOMY DEMAND

rds Pace Vacaville

Chest to Start Annual Drive February 13

Quota Will Not Be Fixed Until After Meeting With Agencies

The Community Chest will launch its drive February 13. This was announced at a special meeting in the Community Chest offices in the City Hall yesterday afternoon of the newly-organized board of directors over which Ralph

PHILIPPO GIVES HIS 'FORMULA' ON WITNESS STAND

Promoter Explains His Process for Making Liquid Sugar

ENTERS DENIALS

Witness Declares He Spent $50,000 in Promoting Plants

Fruit Center Arms Against Reports of Kidnap Reprisals

State Urged to Take Part in Labor 'War'

SACRAMENTO, Dec. 6.—(United Press)—Demands for State intervention in the Vacaville labor "war

March on Town by Lab Agitators Rumored to Town Authorities

REVENGE IS HINTE

Six Prisoners, Victims Jail Onslaught, Speal in Sacramento

VACAVILLE, Calif., Dec. (Associated Press)—Armed

host of well-armed sheriff's deputies, state police, American Legionnaires, and fire department volunteers. To ease the tension the officials allowed the marchers to hold a rally at strike headquarters. About 200 strikers and sympathizers attended; roadblocks and police warnings probably discouraged others. The rally proceeded with speeches and demands for an end to vigilante action, and the delegates departed without further incident.

Hunger Marches

While both townspeople and strikers were catching their breath, a new confrontation threatened as a result of plans for a hunger march through Vacaville. In the early thirties hunger marches were signs of the times. Organized by the Communists, they stirred more anger and resentment than sympathy. Early in December 1932—the day after the vigilante incident in Vacaville—a bedraggled army of 1,200 hunger marchers paraded

down the streets of Washington, D.C., chanting "feed the hungry, tax the rich" and demanding government assistance. It was a futile gesture, but the Communists exploited the spectacle and planned others.

The march through Vacaville was to be only one leg of a statewide hunger march that would bring delegates from all over the state to Sacramento. Organizers appealed to the Vacaville City Council to furnish about thirty marchers expected to pass through the area with two meals and a night's lodging. Citing the city debt of $5,000, the council denied the request and refused to issue a parade permit. To one marcher's comment that "there was not much liberty in free America," Councilman Delbert Mowers retorted that "if he did not like this country he could get out."

Despite the uncooperative attitude of city officials, about forty marchers arrived by car on January 7, 1933, and spent the night in the homes of local Spanish residents. They left without incident the next day and joined other marchers in Sacramento. After presenting to the legislature a petition that, among other things, called for a fifty-dollar payment to every unemployed person; unemployment insurance; and moratoriums on taxes, foreclosures, and tenant evictions, the marchers broke up and headed for home. About fifty came back through Vacaville on January 10, but local officials had been forewarned and called in reserves from surrounding towns to prevent trouble. The marchers met the officials at the Ulatis Creek Bridge, were again refused a parade permit, and retired to the old Sanchez garage on McClellan Street to hold a rally with the strikers.

One marcher, according to an observer, exhorted the strikers to keep the faith. "We must not let the work in Vacaville fall down," he admonished. "Our demands are not too great, and you have the workers of the whole state behind you. We've got them licked and we'll win as they did in the Soviet Union." Probably the chairman's remarks more accurately reflected the general mood: "We are not looking for trouble," he said; "all we want is bread and butter."

End of the Pruners' Strike

Bread and butter in the form of higher wages and better working conditions also summed up the goals of the strikers, but their cause was hopeless. In a final act of defiance, on January 17 the strike chairman sent a message to the three growers against which the strike had been called:

> The following demands were voted upon by a mass meeting of the strikers: The strike will be called off upon acceptance of the following demands: 1. No discrimination against persons who have participated in the strike. 2. No discrimination regardless of race, color or creed. 3. No blacklisting of strikers.

The growers ignored the message. "Inasmuch as they declare that they recognize no strike," reported the newspaper, "therefore they are not called upon to answer." When the strikers asked for their jobs back, however, they were all rehired.

With the strike over, all that remained was to wind up the court proceedings against the local strike leaders. All six defendants—those who had been transferred to Fairfield December 4—demanded a jury trial. Their case came before Vacaville Municipal Judge Sinclair M. Dobbins three weeks later. After more than 100 prospective jurors were dismissed for "expressing prejudice," a panel was finally seated, and the trial began. It ended two days later in a hung jury. One juror later explained that despite attempted intimidation by other jurors he voted for acquittal, because "there was not a single witness who said they had done anything to terrorize the people of Vacaville." A second trial met the same fate as the first. At the third trial, however, the jury found all six defendants guilty of violating the 1895 ordinance against parading without a permit. Dobbins fined each $100 and sentenced them to thirty days in the county jail, but he suspended the sentence against one defendant, a local Spanish youth who was under twenty-one.

All these preliminaries came to naught, because the defendants won their case on appeal. Superior Court Judge W.J. O'Donnell, in a five-page decision, declared the 1895 ordinance unconstitutional and reversed the lower court judgment. In the meantime the district attorney dropped charges against a Sacramento man who had been arrested during the Sousa Ranch riot, because Constable Stadtfeld was unable to testify. The six vigilante victims offered to return for trial, and a spokesman for the International Labor Defense indicated they could identify about twenty-five of their assailants, but neither side pursued the matter and the spokesman was eventually expelled from the I.L.D. for absconding with $130 in workers' funds. That bit of comic relief helped clear the air and bring an end to the long and bitter controversy.

More Trouble for the Spaniards

For the local Spaniards the Vacaville Riots had a rather unpleasant sequel in 1936 during the Civil War in Spain. The clash of arms overseas divided the loyalties of Spanish emigrés the world over. Like others, the Vacaville community split into a merchant group sympathetic to General Francisco Franco and a working class supporting the Loyalists and their Communist allies. One of the merchants, labeled Fascist by a Spanish group calling itself the "Popular Anti-Fascist Committee," enlisted the aid of Police Chief Alley and the American Legion in trying to drive out what he charged were Communists in control of the Spanish Society. The feud led first to a legal battle over control of the society, then to a raid by Vacaville city officials on society headquarters during the showing of a controversial film. The film, "Spain in Flames," had been banned in other cities because of its pro-Communist sympathies. According to Mayor Cox, who assisted Chief Alley and his two deputies in making the raid, society leaders violated the law by showing the film without securing a $2.50 permit from the city council under the terms of an old ordi-

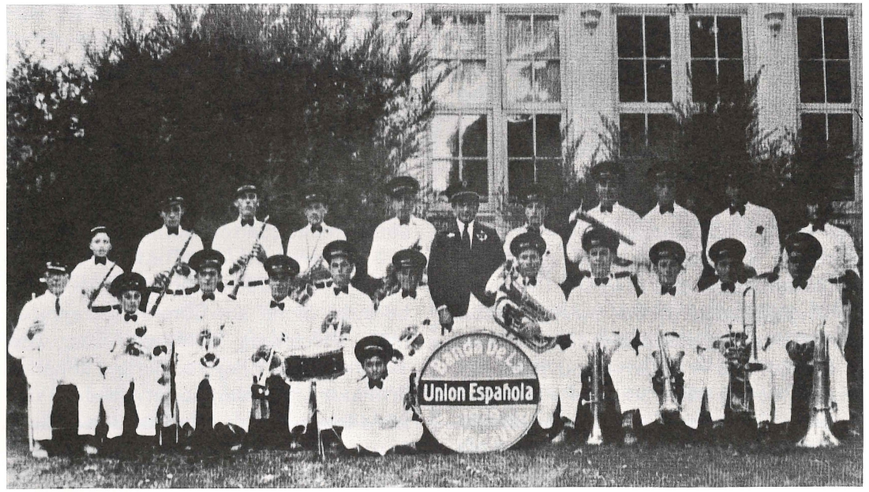
nance. Four men were arrested and booked but released on bond.

The precipitous action of Vacaville authorities opened Pandora's box. To the Spanish consul who came from San Francisco to investigate the incident, Chief Alley claimed the local Spaniards had been duped by outside Communist agitators, but the familiar charge had a hollow ring this time. Even Reverend Fruhling, who had so vociferously attacked the Communists four years earlier, defended the attempt to show the film. He saw the danger in arbitrarily taking away basic constitutional rights.

At a crowded protest rally a week after the raid, State Assemblyman Ellis Patterson of Kings City soft-pedaled the Communist issue. He said the important question was how to support the Loyalists in Spain who were being murdered by Fascists. The Vacaville Spaniards, who had already raised over $1,000 for the Loyalists, were trying to raise more money by showing the film. He said he could not call himself a "respectable American citizen" unless he supported the Loyalists, and he defended the local Spaniards who, he argued, were working for a worthy cause.

Despite the pressure, Vacaville authorities stuck to their guns. They refused to issue a permit to show the film, and they pressed the charges against the four defendants. The case took a year to reach municipal court; then it was delayed twice because a jury could not be secured. Finally the defendants agreed to plead guilty and pay the $2.50 regular license fee, and the case was closed.

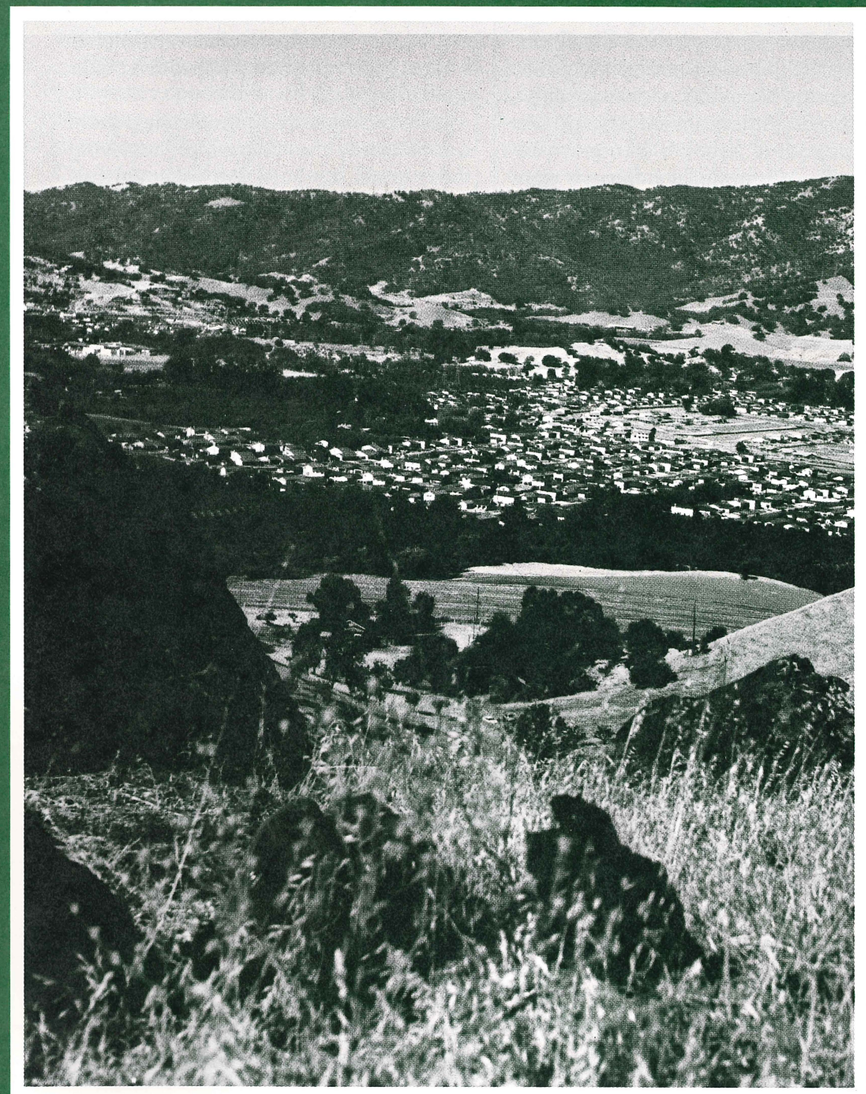
To preserve their heritage, Vacaville Spaniards organized clubs like this 1929 band.



Conclusion

Spanish labor problems and the Communist issue in Vacaville were the products of an age of poverty and uncertainty. In the thirties America went through the worst period of labor violence in its history. The Communist influence also reached a peak at the same time; by 1938 the party had grown to perhaps 100,000 members. Although communism and unionism were inseparable in the minds of many Americans, in fact the American labor movement was essentially conservative and distinctly anti-Communist except at the fringes. Out of desperation the agricultural workers in California accepted Communist aid and used Communist tactics, but unorganized farm workers fundamentally wanted the same things as their conservative fellow workers in the organized industries: higher wages, shorter working hours, and better conditions.

With or without Communist help there was virtually no chance of achieving these goals, because American agriculture was suffering more severely than any other segment of the economy. But ever since the Depression the Communist stigma has clouded the farm labor picture and made it harder for unions to develop. The Vacaville pruners' strike of 1932, therefore, had a long-lasting but ultimately negative impact on the California labor movement. As a trial balloon for Communist labor strategy, the Vacaville strike set the stage for larger and more violent confrontations.



PART FIVE

Modern Vacaville

Vacaville today is a bustling, expanding city of 38,000 people, most of whom arrived after 1960. Probably less than 5 percent of the current population have lived in Vacaville more than twenty years.

The contrast between old and new Vacaville can largely be explained by two forces: war and its aftermath, and "automobility." War industries created the jobs that ended the Depression in Vacaville. War workers looking for living quarters caused the first modern housing booms and the growth of subdivisions. War babies crowded the schools and forced the city to vastly expand its educational resources. Both cold war tensions and postwar American involvement in the Far East contributed to Vacaville's growth as a convenient bedroom community for those who worked at nearby military and related installations.

Then came the commuter boom of the sixties and seventies. Aided by superhighways and compact cars, urban workers seeking the "good life" found it in Vaca Valley only an hour or less from their jobs. Vacaville today continues to attract urban refugees from Sacramento and the Bay Area, but the commuter influx has radically altered the look and character of the community. Modern Vacaville bears little resemblance to the small town that barely survived the throes of Depression forty years ago.

Vacaville in World War II

"Safe." That was the only word on the cablegram from Honolulu a few days after December 7, 1941. It was a terse message, but it brought tears of joy to Mr. and Mrs. L.W. Roulund of Vacaville, whose son Dean was teaching in Hawaii. Despite the distance from Main Street to the mid-Pacific, the presence of some of Vacaville's sons in the battle zone brought the impact of Pearl Harbor directly to the folks back home. Like thousands of other small towns on the mainland, Vacaville found itself embroiled in World War II.

During the war dozens of Vacaville men and women participated in every theater and in every type of military service. Robert Costello served on a mine sweeper in the Pacific. George Martinez took part in the battle of Savo Island while a crewman aboard the cruiser **Salt Lake City**. Robert Power carried a rifle in Patton's Army after the Normandy invasion. In a patriotic record matched by few, seven sons of the James T. Boyle family served in the armed forces during the war.

Fortune smiled on most of these participants. Rudolph Dito left Midway Island when his construction crew was evacuated just before the Japanese attacked. Hugh Koford, ensign on the U.S.S. **Maryland**, had shore leave the night before Pearl Harbor, but got back to his ship just in time to help pick oil-covered sailors out of the water. David McCready, tail gunner aboard a B-25, was shot down during an air raid on the island of Cavite in the South Pacific but was rescued along with fourteen other airmen by the famed "Arkansas Traveler," a U.S. Navy Catalina that made four heroic rescue landings during the battle.

Others were not so lucky. Lieutenant Michael L. Libonati, Jr., Vacaville's first war casualty, was a cousin of Frank Rago, the first hometown man killed in World War I. Before the war was over, Vacaville lost ten more fighting men.

While hometown soldiers served overseas, noncombatants back home played a vital auxiliary role. Mobilizing the home front was remarkably simple considering the lack of preparedness before December 7, but the Japanese surprise attack had united American opinion as never before. President Roosevelt spoke for all Americans in a fireside chat two days after the United States entered the war: "We don't like it—we didn't want to get in it—but we are in it, and we're going to fight it with everything we've got." To Americans on the home front the task was clear: give the soldiers, sailors, and airmen what they needed to win the war.

Civil Defense

Before they could start supplying troops abroad, cities and towns on the West Coast had to protect themselves. Overriding fear of a Japanese attack on the mainland prompted emergency defense measures. It is easy to ridicule such actions today, since we know from hindsight that Japan was in no position to raid, much less invade, the West Coast. But in December of 1941 ignorance and fear combined to make mountains out of molehills. Every suspicious act, every unidentified sound, every rumor, was sufficient to cause alarm. Given the extraordinary circumstances the reaction was understandable.

Three days after Pearl Harbor, Vacaville took the first official steps to defend itself. Since it was within a fifty-mile radius of San Francisco, the army's blackout rules and regulations applied locally. The city council appointed a local defense council to enforce blackout procedures, and Chief Air Warden Bernard J. Day with twenty assistants patrolled the community's ten defense districts.

Blackout procedures were complicated: each home had to have a blackout room where no light escaped, every car's lights had to be masked, and all street lights and neon signs had to be extinguished. Every patriotic householder had sand bags and buckets of water handy in case of fire bombs, and during blackouts boys and girls did their part by seeing that the kitchen sink and the bathtub were filled. Some confusion was inevitable, as the second blackout January 3, 1942, demonstrated. The fire siren on the old City Hall sounded the air raid alarm at 7 p.m., but local residents mistook the signal and ran out prepared to fight fire. When the lights went out they got the message and rushed back home. In the meantime, at the little hospital on Elizabeth Street, attending staff had to use flashlights to assist Mrs. Mannie Thompson, whose baby boy didn't wait until the lights came on to enter the brave new world.

There were other early precautions. To frustrate enemy fliers, the weather

bureau ordered C.J. Uhl and other weather observers to wait twenty-four hours before releasing rainfall figures or other data. As a means of identifying all possible resources for the war effort, army officials ordered farmers to register all horses and mules with the western area headquarters in San Mateo. The mules never got called, but many high school students took a direct part in local civil defense by staffing two air raid warning observation posts during the early years of the war.

Supervised by Mrs. O.E. Alley and paid for with contributions from the chamber of commerce, the observation posts were manned twenty-four hours a day until 1943. In that year they were consolidated into one post. Located on the Buckley ranch in city limits and constructed at city expense, the post was built by high school agricultural shop students under the direction of Carroll Mundy. Mr. and Mrs. Neat Tate took over chief observer duties, but in 1944 all observer stations across the country were closed by order of Secretary of War Stimson, who explained that observers were needed for other war work. By that time the fear of Japanese air raids had long since passed.

Internment of the Japanese

The removal of American citizens of Japanese descent from coastal areas was of course the most controversial emergency defense measure of the war, but very few openly questioned the wisdom of the action at the time. In Vacaville the 1940 census indicated a total of 333 Japanese, 135 of them aliens and 198 native born. Vaca Valley elementary school principal E.H. Padan in 1942 estimated that there were a total of 48 Japanese families in the community, with 76 Japanese children in grammar school and 40 in high school.

Most of the Japanese families lived along Kendal and Dobbins Streets, although some families lived where they worked, on fruit ranches scattered among the hills and valleys. The Oriental business district had declined since its heyday at the turn of the century, but still there were some fifteen Japanese businesses left, including Mishi's Beauty Shop, T-K Barber Shop, Ichimoto's Pool Room, and Harry's Grocery. The Buddhist Temple remained a feature attraction in the community. On at least one occasion it had hosted a Northern California Buddhist Convention.

In addition to the older Japanese Association that still remained active, local Japanese in 1935 had organized a Vacaville branch of the Japanese American Citizens League. JACL members worked hard to elevate the political and social status of Japanese-Americans and to bring them into the mainstream of American life. They welcomed opportunities to participate in local affairs, and they took pride in positive examples of racial integration. Although social contacts between Japanese and non-Japanese were few, in Vacaville all races worked together in the fields, and public schools had been integrated from the beginning. Non-Japanese residents cheered just as loudly as Japanese fans when Frank "Flash" Ichimoto, for example, led the Vacaville high school football team to victory in 1940. Race was not an issue in Vacaville and hadn't been for over twenty years.

Then came Pearl Harbor. Before that day ended shots were fired into the Buddhist Temple. The local paper attributed the incident to "some impetuous youths" who were never caught, but it was a portent of things to come. Police Chief Alley promised to prosecute such violations to the full extent of the law, but at the same time he warned local Japanese "not to move about too freely during the day and remain at home during the night." Anxious to demonstrate their loyalty, Japanese-American citizens voluntarily turned in their guns and cameras and passed resolutions condemning the Japanese imperialists abroad. They pledged full support for national defense, and they encouraged their sons to join the army. By the end of 1941 five of the twenty-eight men inducted from Vacaville were of Japanese ancestry.

Despite loyalty pledges and voluntary cooperation, Japanese-Americans in California faced a bleak future. Every victory by Japanese troops abroad increased the pressure for action against Japanese in the United States, regardless of whether or not they were citizens.

Vacaville's air observation post, constructed by the Future Farmers in 1942

White fear and war fever blurred the distinctions between alien and native born. Prejudice and economic competition also played their part in victimizing American-born Japanese. Torn between protecting the constitutional rights of a minority and meeting the demands of civilian and military spokesmen on the West Coast who wanted "protection" from potential saboteurs, the federal government drew on its emergency powers to set aside the Constitution.

The roundup of Japanese in California began February 21, 1942, when the F.B.I., in coordinated raids, arrested hundreds of Japanese aliens and leaders of the Japanese community regardless of birthplace. In the Vacaville area eight men were arrested and booked as "dangerous" aliens, including Huishi Hayashi, well-known local fruit grower who had been in Vacaville since 1918, but was prohibited by United States law from becoming a naturalized citizen. He was shipped to San Francisco for interrogation, then back to Sacramento where he and dozens of others were placed aboard a train that took them to a concentration camp in Bismarck, North Dakota.

Two weeks later General DeWitt issued the general removal order and published an evacuation schedule for both aliens and "American-born persons of Japanese lineage." He gave the remaining Japanese one month to dispose of their property. The time was both too short and too long—too short for orderly disposal of property and too long to prevent local harrassment. Vacaville's Japanese families did what they could to store or sell cars, refrigerators, washing machines, and other household items, but many things were simply given away to non-Japanese friends or left for the scavengers.

Despite Chief Alley's attempt to keep the peace, a few local hotheads bullied and sometimes looted the vulnerable Japanese as they prepared to depart. Late in March two men brazenly broke into Harry Nishioka's store and helped themselves to cash and merchandise. Mrs. Nishioka shined a flashlight on the burglars but was too terrified to interfere. Her husband had already been arrested and removed. Two other thieves threw a sack over the head of an old Japanese man on the Marshal ranch east of Vacaville and stole a tank of gas. Then they crossed the road and purloined the automobile of another Japanese. None of the perpetrators of these and other crimes against the Japanese were ever arrested.

Most Japanese escaped such outrages, but the longer they remained the more vocal their critics became. Late in March the Solano County Board of Supervisors passed a unanimous resolution urging immediate removal. In the board's view it was "impossible to tell which are loyal and which are not, and . . . great danger may result from their residence here." To the editor of the Vacaville **Reporter,** Japanese-American evacuation was a war necessity. "Only war could make this government of a free people take such drastic action—herding one race in totalitarian style. This is war in its utmost," he said.

The mass evacuation began April 30,

when the first contingent of Vacaville Japanese left by train to prepare the Turlock fairgrounds for others who followed over the next three days. The last train left Vacaville Sunday morning, May 2, bearing 408 Solano County Japanese-Americans. It was a tearful spectacle witnessed by hundreds of non-Japanese residents who came to watch as their friends were herded aboard by armed soldiers. Mrs. Terry Nakatani, eleven years old at the time, remembers carrying her lunch aboard and promising to write to several friends who were standing nearby. Mrs. Eleanor Nelson, who had taught most of the Japanese youngsters in high school, was there, and so was Rudy Werner, the town mayor who had felt Japanese-Americans had a right to hold a patriotic meeting in the Buddhist Church right after Pearl Harbor but was gruffly overruled by the county sheriff.

Aboard the train were a few soldiers, a doctor, and two nurses who accompanied the evacuees to Turlock, where they disembarked at the fairgrounds. They were there several weeks, living in the livestock sheds until the permanent relocation centers were completed. Terry remembers having to share a horse stall with another Vacaville family, separated only by a thin partition. The Hayashi family got a welcome surprise while at Turlock, for Huishi joined them after being released from the alien camp at Bismarck with the help of Frank McKevitt, who wrote to justice department officials assuring them that Hayashi was loyal.

In August the Vacaville Japanese reembarked for what was to become their home for the next three years, the Gila River camp near Rivers, Arizona. They moved into army barracks divided into four living compartments, two large and two small. The seven members of the Nakatani family found themselves in a small one-room compartment with cots and an oil heater. Each block of fifteen or sixteen barracks had a common bathroom, showers, washroom, and mess hall.

Vacaville Japanese in Arizona, 1942

Barbed wire and soldiers surrounded the camp, but inside the Japanese were left alone to mark time for the duration. Some went to school; others left on work permits after a few months; still others joined the Army, including six or seven Vacaville men. Sam Yoshihara, a Vacaville High School graduate, was one of the first volunteers from Rivers. He fought with the famed 442nd Infantry and was wounded in Italy. Tomio Ter-

Esther Eldredge, daughter of contractor George Sharpe and one of the town's most unforgettable characters, managed the Vacaville labor office before she became city librarian. During World War II she was an able recruiter for local farmers who were desperately short of field and orchard hands, especially after the Japanese left. "The bindlestiffs adored me down in the jungle," she recalls. "I used to go down and lean over the bridge and say: 'Pete! Paul! Anybody! Come on up; I want two!' And they'd come up and I'd say: 'So and so wants you to pick fruit. Now come at noon and I'll take you out there. Don't forget!' I took them everyplace. The farmers here never thought about it because I'd always done what I pleased. I had no fear of people." In 1943 the United States Employment Service took over. Government officials who came to town asked the farmers to recommend someone to run the new office, so long as it wasn't a woman. But the farmers said either hire Esther or "we'll run it as we are." "So they took me," she said with a twinkle in her eye. "Wasn't that fun! To be the only woman going to [meetings] that had hundreds of men." Later a government inspector told officials: "Let Mrs. Eldredge run the office exactly as she pleases. She has one of the most vital offices in the state."

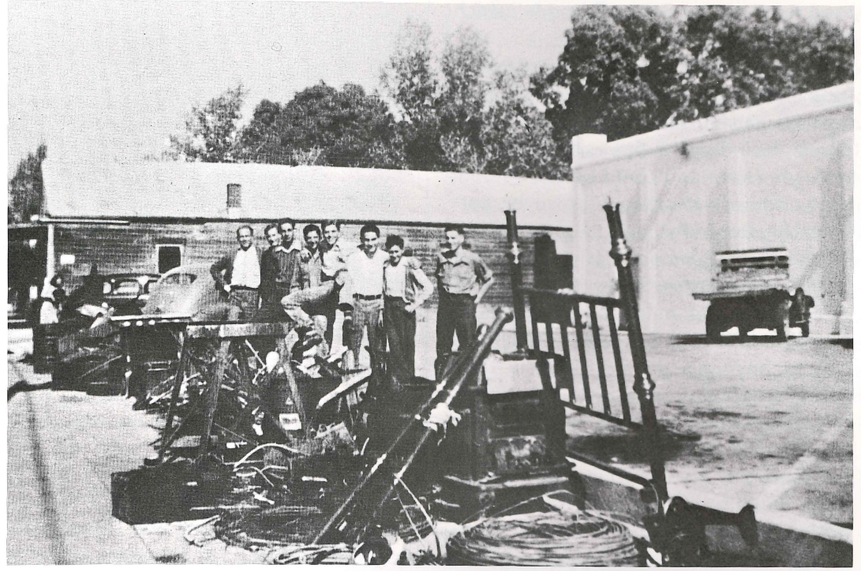
aura was trained at the army intelligence school at Fort Snelling, Minnesota, and served as an interpreter in the latter days of the war in the Pacific. The unsurpassed combat records of Japanese-American servicemen from Vacaville and elsewhere helped build bridges of respect and understanding in the United States, but at war's end there was still a long way to go.

The Home Front

Japanese removal left both a social and an emotional void in Vacaville, but those who remained had no time to contemplate the impact on the town or the future consequences. There was a war to win, and townspeople turned to the task at hand with almost universal determination and self-sacrifice. It took considerable patience, for instance, to put up with the inconvenience of rationing.

Rubber tires were the first commodity to be rationed, and the local tire-rationing committee—Frank McKevitt, Fred Nay, and A.A. Collier—had their hands full enforcing federal regulations and handling special cases. Commuting defense workers at Mare Island and the Benicia Arsenal were especially hard hit by tire rationing, but Congressman Frank Buck helped relieve that problem by prodding the Navy into providing round trip bus service from Vacaville.

Rubber scrap drives began soon after war was declared, and Vacaville did its part. During the national drive in July of 1942, campaign volunteers went door to door collecting everything "from a bathtub stopper to an old tire." Dom Isabella,



manager of the Vacaville Theater, contributed to the cause by exchanging matinee tickets for ten pounds of scrap rubber. The town raised 43 of the county's 195 tons during the drive.

Rationing eventually expanded to include practically every household utensil and foodstuff, including coffee, sugar, shoes, meat, and dried prunes. Gas rationing began in November 1942, not so much to save oil as to protect rubber tires. Long lines waited at the grammar schools to complete the forms and receive ration books, "points coupons," and tokens. Periodic scrap drives combed the community for tin, iron, rubber, copper, animal fat, and other salvage. Carroll Mundy's high school Future Farmers swept through the Oriental district after the Japanese left and turned up several tons of scrap, including an old nickel slot machine with coins still in it dating back to 1899. Two World War I mortars in front of the Youth Building went into the pile along with two old army howitzers that had decorated the facade of the American Legion Hall.

The citizens also did their share of money-raising. During the early years of the war they contributed generously to war bond drives and easily exceeded local quotas. Over 10 percent of estimated local net income went into war bonds up to 1943. Bond enthusiasm diminished by 1944, however, and local bond chairman James McCrory had a

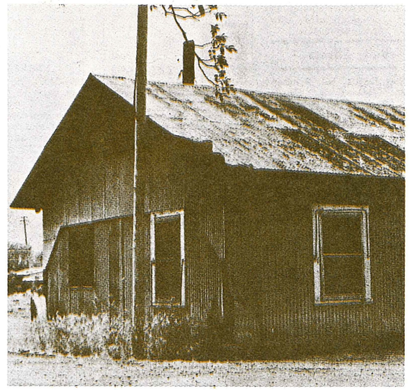
hard time selling Series E bonds, which matured slowly at low interest.

To relieve food shortages and avoid long lines at the market, many back yard farmers raised Victory gardens, sometimes including a few chickens and turkeys. Not much could be done about beef and pork shortages, however, particularly after both local slaughterhouses went out of business early in the war because of state and federal regulations. A black market meat ring operated in town periodically, but how extensive it was is anyone's guess. Early in 1946 sheriff's deputies, responding to reports of cattle rustling, arrested two men in an English Hills hideout. The officers also uncovered a refrigeration plant and a large quantity of processed meat, cattle hides, and sheep pelts.

Wartime Boom

If the war caused inconvenience, it also provided an economic shot in the arm that did more than all the postdepression federal programs combined to revitalize American industry. Vacaville's proximity to the Bay Area and to nearby military and industrial installations made it a convenient bedroom community for war workers. But it also had a booming industry of its own that contributed enormously to the war effort. The combined impact of the Basic Vegetable Products Company and Travis Air Force Base permanently altered the scope and direction of Vacaville's growth.

The roots of the Basic Company go back at least to World War I, when dehydrated vegetables were mass-produced for the first time. The enormous saving in cargo space and refrigeration equipment did not impress American doughboys, however, who found the product almost as unpalatable as canned field rations. Dehydration technology made little progress for more than a decade after the armistice, but in 1932 William M. Hume, an Indiana native, and his partner, J.B. Pardick, opened a small onion dehydration plant in Corpus Christi, Texas.



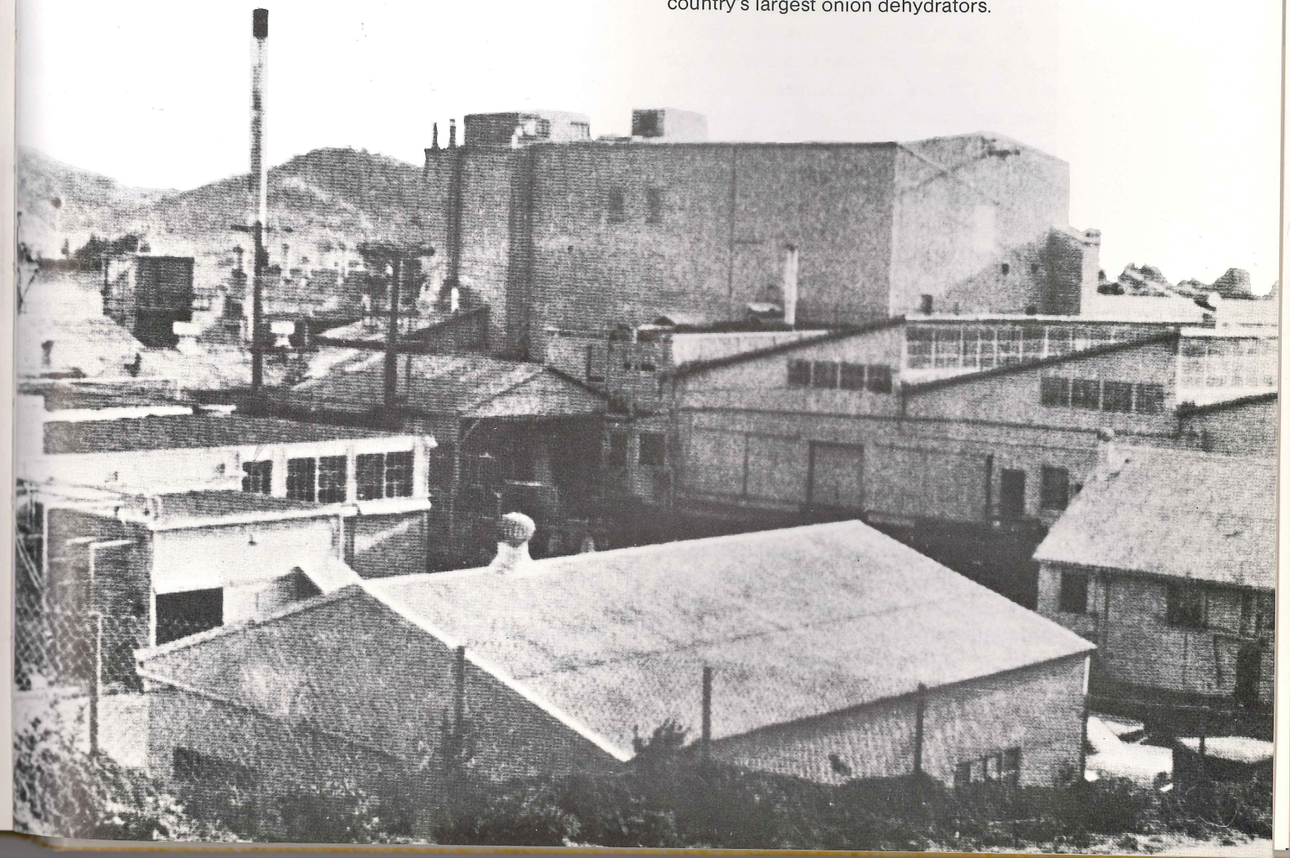
Basic's first office in Vacaville was this tin shed on the Uhl ranch. Now the main offices are in San Francisco.

Texas onion were plentiful but too watery for good dehydration, and the new plant shut down almost as soon as it began. Realizing the need for more research, Bill Hume and his brother Jack, along with Pardick and Roger T. Robinson, a chemical engineer, set up a laboratory in the Hume garage in Pasadena, where the Humes had been living since 1920. There they perfected the drying technique and also discovered how to retain fresh flavor in dehydrated onions and garlic. The next task was to find a favorable climate for onion production. California's Central Valley proved ideal for the best drying varieties, and in 1933 the Humes and Pardick brought their process to Vacaville.

Lacking capital to build a plant of their own, they rented the twenty-five-ton prune dehydrator on the Uhl property during the off season so as not to interfere with Ed Uhl's fruit drying business.

With Pardick in charge of local operations and with a crew of fifteen or twenty, Basic processed 50,000 pounds the first season, enough to demonstrate the success of the process, but a drop in the bucket compared to later production. In 1935 the garage lab in Pasadena moved to Vacaville, but for the next five years growth was slow while skeptical food manufacturers, remembering the tasteless powder of earlier years, tested and retested the new product. Good salesmanship and favorable consumer

The Basic plant on Davis Street is one of the country's largest onion dehydrators.



reaction gradually won over the major American producers of catsup and other prepared foods.

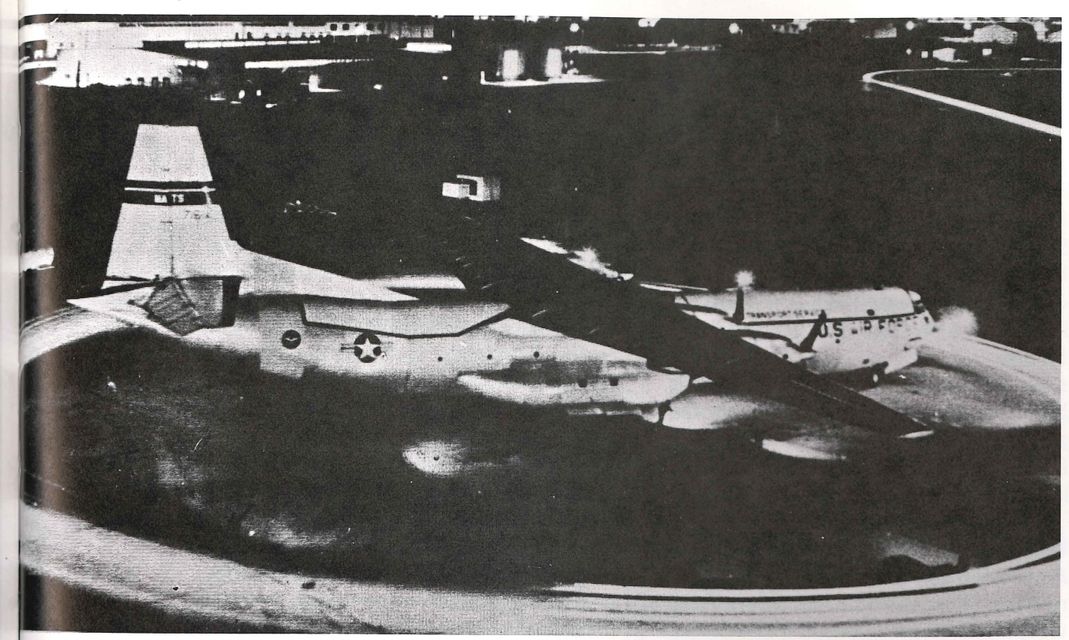
Town merchants welcomed the new enterprise despite some complaints about the penetrating onion odor. In the wake of the Great Depression, dollars were more important than scents to city councilmen who rejected a petition to keep Basic out of the downtown area. Delbert Mowers remembers the prevailing sentiment. One member said he would vote to surround the city with sewers if it "would bring in a payroll like that." Basic thus came to town, moving from the Uhl ranch into the old facilities of the Vacaville Fruit Growers Association on Stevenson Street. In 1940, a year after the move, Jack Hume announced that the Basic Lab had discovered a peach pit preparation that cut the smell by 90 percent. Despite the new technology, the town's chief enterprise still makes an aromatic impression on the occasional visitor, especially during the drying season.

During World War II the dried food industry mushroomed, thanks to the quartermaster corps. In 1940 it picked Basic to supply dried onion chips to the armed forces, and the Vacaville plant soon became the leading onion dehydrator in the country. With a green light from the army, company officials expanded the plant, hired hundreds of new employees, and went to work turning out hermetically sealed five-gallon cans of chips that could be stored almost indefinitely.

Basic onions not only fed American troops abroad but also became a staple of the Allies. Lend-lease administrator Edward R. Stettinius visited Vacaville in 1943 on a general inspection tour, praising both the product and the management. The Basic plant was "one of the finest vegetable dehydrating plants that I have seen anywhere," he said. Less than a year later, in an impressive ceremony witnessed by the entire town, federal officials awarded the Basic plant the Army-Navy "E" Award for outstanding performance. Before the war ended the company received two more "E" Awards.

Despite the national recognition, the key to Basic's success came from the taste buds of soldiers in the field. As one lieutenant in New Guinea, contemplating a plate of dried onions, remarked: "It is possible to use them for lunch and dinner, on canned sausages, meat, stew, etc., and no matter how bad the stuff is it always tastes good with the onions." Another ingenious mess sergeant, aware of the lingering prejudice against dehydrated foods, solved the problem of selling Basic onions to his troops who had not seen them before. He placed the sign "fresh onions" over a serving dish filled with reconstituted Basic products and watched happily as the men snatched them up. Salesmanship of that caliber could not go unrewarded, and company officials hired him after the war. Soon he was setting sales records in the Chicago area.

By the end of the war Basic was running around the clock, with 1,000 employees processing 400,000 pounds



A Military Air Transport Supply plane at Travis Air Force Base, 1963

of fresh onions daily. While other war industries slumped in 1945, Basic reconverted with hardly a dip in production, although to prevent dumping it purchased all of its own surplus from the army and gradually allowed the market to stabilize. The company has since expanded both in variety of products and location, with divisions in King City and eastern Idaho. Although company headquarters are now in San Francisco, the Vacaville plant is still one of the largest industries in town.

Like the Basic Company, Travis Air Base mushroomed during the war. Originally called Ragsdale Field, then Fairfield-Suisun Air Base, the death of its commanding general, Robert F. Travis, in 1950 gave the base its permanent name. Isolated from population centers yet only fifty miles from the coast, nearly fog-free, blessed by prevailing westerlies that pilots and windmills truly appreciate, the site had natural advantages that caught the eye of military planners.

In the summer of 1942, the Army Corps of Engineers began work on a fighter training station that quickly blossomed into a major base for Army Air Corps operations. Next year the Air

Transport Command, predecessor of the Military Air Transport Service, began using the base as a training and staging center for cargo operation in the Pacific theater. Bombing missions were also staged here during the war, and the first B-24 Liberator bomber used in the Pacific flew from this base in July 1943. By the end of the war the army engineers had constructed over four miles of runways, erected more than 250 buildings including a hospital twice the size of Solano County's civilian facility, and spent more than $20 million on the site. But that was only the beginning, for the period of major growth at Travis paralleled postwar America's rising presence in the Far East.

Housing Shortage

As service centers and bedroom communities only a few miles away, Vacaville, Fairfield, and Suisun all had deep and abiding economic relationships with the air base. Base housing could at first accommodate only a fraction of its thousands of military personnel. They and their families had to look to the surrounding communities for living quarters, and so did the 500 civilians employed at the base. In addition, the newcomers had to compete with thousands of other war workers attracted to Solano County after 1940. Trying to relieve a perennial housing shortage that was sometimes desperate became a major preoccupation of city and county officials throughout the war.

Wartime housing shortages came so unexpectedly that city fathers were caught totally unprepared. For a half century before 1940 Vacaville's permanent population remained below 1,600, and not even the most optimistic boosters anticipated rapid expansion. Before 1936 the county had not given much thought to future planning, and even after a county planning commission was established the war interrupted the development of a general plan. In Vacaville planning was almost as haphazard. In 1939 the council approved the city's first zoning ordinance, but a city planning commission was not organized until 1944. Serious planning for Vacaville's future therefore did not really get off the ground until after the war. Without adequate machinery and with no guidelines to follow, the city resorted to short-term solutions to housing and growth problems. That pattern was characteristic of most American communities before the fifties.

The first clear sign that wartime growth would create housing problems for Vacaville came in the summer of 1940, when Delmar McCune, president of the local chamber of commerce, broadcast an appeal for local cooperation to help relieve the acute housing pressure created by the buildup of war workers at Mare Island Navy Yard. Few vacancies were available, however, and contractors soon found construction materials diverted to wartime needs. Acute turned to desperate after America entered the war, with hundreds of newcomers looking for shelter.

Local residents shared what they had—garages, attics, even chicken coops—but it was not nearly enough, nor was it suitable for anything more than emergency use. War workers who took over the Oriental district after the Japanese were removed complained of the deplorable conditions and the "fishy" odor, but even worse were the dilapidated fruit sheds and warehouses, abandoned for years and converted to shantytown dwellings during the war.

Even by the standards of the time most of the newcomers had to accept substandard housing, and they were lucky to get housing at all. A rent freeze after July of 1942 further complicated the problem by practically eliminating private incentive for new construction—even if materials were available. The obvious solution was government housing, and by the end of 1942 Vacaville joined in a countywide appeal for federal help.

Help arrived in 1943 from two agencies. In May the Federal Housing Authority approved the construction of fifty private homes by Alvin K. Schultz, president of Bay Counties Home Company, a Millbrae firm. Built on scattered lots along Kentucky, Luzena, Walnut, and Elm Streets at a cost of $4,000 to $6,000 each, the homes were finished before the end of the year and occupied immediately. Indeed, so desperate was the need that Homer Bolter, the real estate agent handling FHA homes, had many more applicants for the houses than he had space available.

In the meantime the Federal Public Housing Authority gave the green light to Vacaville's first public housing project. On a ten-acre parcel acquired from the estate of the late Congressman Frank H. Buck, who had died unexpectedly during his 1942 reelection campaign, FPHA officials authorized the construction of thirty-five multiple dwelling units designed to accommodate 140 new families. Located on orchard land next to the Catholic Church, bounded on the west side by a romantic little country road appropriately called "Lovers Lane," the site lay outside the city limits but was ideal for the purpose.

Construction began in July 1943 on "Vaca Valley Acres," the name chosen by FPHA officials among dozens submitted in a local contest sponsored by the Vacaville Theater for which the two winners split a prize of $18.75 in war savings stamps. As soon as the carpenters finished a unit it was filled, and in less than a year project manager Walter Schaefer reported 600 persons living at the site. It was a modest facility but certainly an improvement over garages and chicken coops.

David McCready and his wife lived there right after the war in a "zero bedroom unit." It consisted of an unfurnished living room (which also served as the bedroom), a kitchen, and a bathroom. Since consumer goods were in short supply, to get a refrigerator the McCreadys had to buy a "package deal" consisting of a living room and dining room set as well as complete bedroom furnishings—nearly more furniture than the tiny apartment could hold. On the other hand, the unit rented for nineteen dollars a month.

The conquest of Iwo Jima, March 14, 1945, was celebrated in Vacaville two days later.

The new construction was only a stopgap; it did not solve the housing shortage. Before the end of 1943 city officials once more sought government help. Combining housing needs with downtown renewal, they urged federal authorities to condemn the remaining buildings in the old Oriental district and replace them with a new public housing project. By then the Oriental district had become an eyesore and a public nuisance. Only three Chinese families remained; the rest were white war workers at Basic or Mare Island. Red tape and tenant fears delayed the proceedings several months, but state officials finally condemned the district after a state inspection revealed "that the buildings were unsanitary, decayed, dilapidated and all embodied violations of the state housing act to such an extent that it does not appear to be either feasible or economical to attempt to rehabilitate them."

The city eventually acquired the nine-acre triangle bounded by Ulatis Creek and Dobbins and Kendal Streets, and FPHA provided $130,000 for the construction of sixty dwelling units in twenty-two buildings. Construction began at once on the new "Ulatis Park" addition, which opened in 1944 and filled all too soon. Nearly 200 applicants had to be turned away, and before the war was over the air base commander once again had to plead with Solano County residents to make available any room that could be spared for a new influx of military personnel. The same pattern of excess demand and limited supply persists in the Vacaville housing industry today, but most of the newcomers since the late 1960s have been commuters.

Social Changes

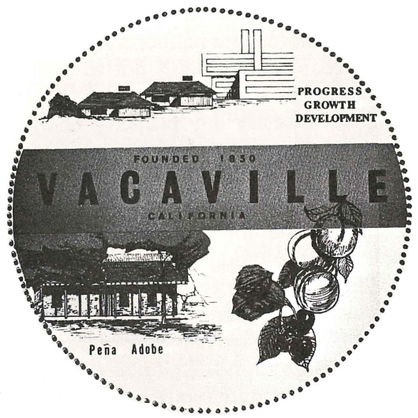
The presence of large numbers of young males during the war years had a social as well as an economic impact on the community. Early in the war Leila McKevitt and the Red Cross volunteers organized a branch of the USO to entertain servicemen. Hospitality House, as it was called, had everything from dance parties to card tournaments. Every night except Monday, men from the air base gathered to dance with pretty local hostesses, sing around the piano, play cards, read books from a well-stocked library, or write letters home.

Those who sought more challenging entertainment found it in the local pool halls and taverns, which offered black jack, craps, and other forms of gambling. All of this was of course illegal, but local officials closed their eyes as long as proprietors kept the games under local control. One former Vacaville official claims gambling helped keep property taxes low by providing an extra source of city income, but city records don't provide any evidence either to support or to dismiss that theory. Some evidence exists to indicate that local prostitution continued into the forties, and in 1941 city officials were embarrassed to discover they had issued a hotel license to a brothel. Servicemen soon found that the best red light district was in Benicia, but local gaming persisted until the late forties, when Governor Warren's anti-vice campaign finally shut down all the bordellos and casinos in the state.

The vices that accompanied urban growth during the war years were offset by the blessings it brought to the community. Local business boomed as it had not done for twenty years; population growth stimulated community planning and modernization; new challenges brought new opportunities for progress in a town that had not witnessed real growth for two decades. Although the war emergency caused temporary shortages and inconveniences, in the long run it did more than anything else to move Vacaville out of its economic doldrums.

The war was also an important force for social change. Japanese removal was an unnecessary and tragic act that left a permanent scar on the national image. Even worse was the rise of anti-Japanese hate groups that tried in vain to prevent the return of Japanese-Americans to the West Coast. In 1943 and 1944, while the War Relocation Authority was beginning to phase out the camps, nearly every social and political organization in California passed resolutions opposing the return. Vacaville's experience was not untypical, for more than fifteen hundred local residents signed petitions objecting to the return and vowing not to "sell, lease, rent or hire to any person of Japanese ancestry any property or interest therein." Ironically, by bringing new people to California, the war and its aftermath rapidly changed the social matrix in Vacaville and in other California communities. Although only a handful of Japanese-American citizens returned to Vacaville, the bitterness quickly dissipated, and new arrivals with different ethnic backgrounds helped develop a more tolerant and integrated society.

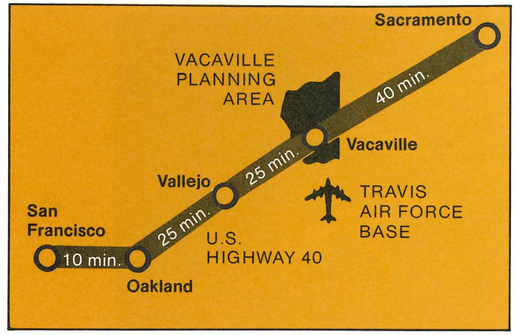
Vacaville Today: Postwar Growth and Transformation



The history of Vacaville from about 1945 to the present can be summed up in the three words found on the seal of the city: progress, growth, development. Three motifs also appear on the seal: the Peña Adobe, the fruit symbol, and urban construction. All reflect the deep sense of historical growth that has been a marked characteristic of the people of Vacaville since the foundation of the town in 1850.

On the eve of the Second World War, Vacaville had a population of 1,614 people, not a great deal more than the 1,220 population of 1900. In each of the four following decades, however, population expansion was tremendous. By the end of 1977, the estimated population had reached 38,000, and, by the best estimate of the city officials that figure will grow to 83,920 by the year 2000, nearly a fourth of all the people of Solano County!

Newcomers flocked to Vaca Valley by the thousands on the new four-lane highway that became Interstate 80 in the 1960s. It linked San Francisco, Solano County, and Sacramento along the familiar route that has persisted in one form or another since the period of the Mexican ranchos. New housing tracts replaced old orchards, and the city council annexed new subdivisions as fast as they could be opened. The population influx required new and expanded public services and constant planning for the future in ways not considered necessary or even possible in earlier years. To meet the challenge of urban growth—the "growing pains" of urbanization felt by many similar communities in the postwar



The San Francisco–Sacramento freeway

period—Vacaville left the last of its small town image behind and opened a new chapter in its history.

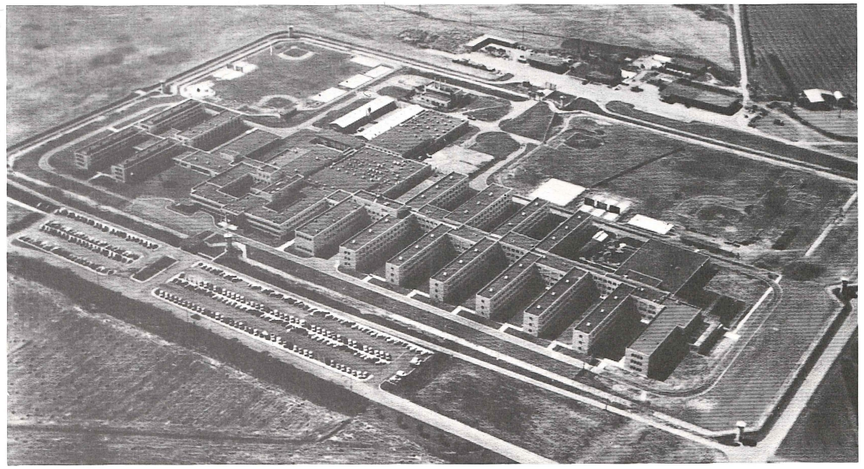
This was not an easy path for many citizens, and various questionnaires and surveys showed that many of the townspeople felt that such rapid growth was undesirable. It was a far cry from the early boosters of the town who frequently called for more houses and more families to inhabit them. Three main concerns were aired: (1) growth was outstripping facilities and services and depriving both old and new citizens; (2) the historic small town atmosphere was being replaced by the nightmare of modern urban problems; and (3) urban sprawl threatened to absorb good agricultural lands and open hills and to alter the physical setting of the city that had been so attractive to so many for so long. Such concerns were countered by a continuing determination to provide for the town's citizens, and just possibly to make it a major center in the traditional corridor between the Bay Area and Sacramento.

The Public Sector

The growth that began with World War II accelerated beyond all expectations after 1945. This was due in large part to the emergence of Travis Air Force Base as one of the most active military airports in the world. Scores of veterans stationed at the base during the war years liked the community and returned later with their families. Some took civilian jobs at the base, others returned to enjoy the comfortable hills and valleys, and still others found jobs in nearby industrial centers and started the commuting pattern that has become a major characteristic of modern Vacaville.

Travis mushroomed during the cold war years. In 1948 the Military Air Transport Supply arrived, and the Strategic Air Command followed a year later. The Korean War put new pressures on base facilities, which required increases in defense spending. By the early 1960s, the 5,000-acre air base employed nearly 40,000 personnel and contained over $500 million worth of installations. Nearby Fairfield annexed the air base in 1966, and both Fairfield and Vacaville reaped great economic benefits from its location near their cities. In 1977, of the nearly 8,500 persons in the work force in Vacaville, about 16.6 percent, or over 1,400 persons, were employed in military work in Fairfield/Suisun City and at the Travis Air Force Base. It had become the major source of employment for the workers of Vacaville.

Smaller by comparison, but still important in shaping postwar growth in Vacaville, was the California Medical Facility,



The California Medical Facility, a psychiatric hospital in the state prison system

which was authorized in 1944 by the California State Department of Corrections and was opened in 1955. It was built two miles south of the city on 730 acres of orchard properties once owned by Frank Buck and Frederick Chandler.

The Vacaville Medical Facility is a psychiatric hospital in the state prison system. The first of its kind in California and the second in national importance after the Federal Medical Center at Springfield, Missouri, the Vacaville facility offers diagnostic services, medical and psychiatric treatment, educational opportunities, and occupational therapy to mentally disturbed inmates of every description from unknown sex offenders to notorious headliners like Charles Manson, Sirhan Sirhan, and Juan Corona. The facility handles about 1,150 inmates and has some 785 civil service employees. By 1977 a large number of Vacaville workers were employed there, and it was the second largest area employer.

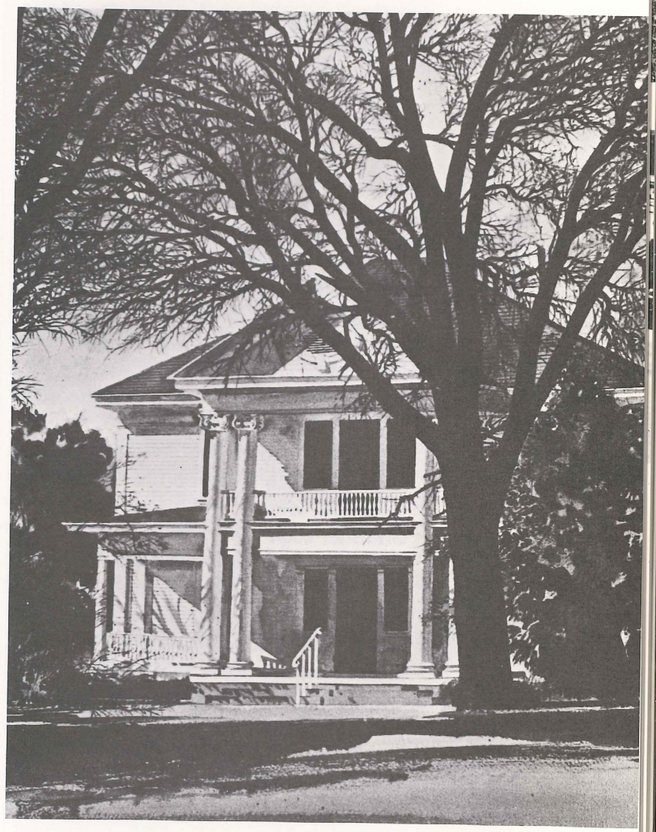
Private Enterprise

While postwar growth had the greatest impact on the public sector of the economy, private enterprise also leaped ahead after 1945. Out on Highway 80 but within the city limits, the Nut Tree added a new kitchen, a dining room, and a toy and gift shop. By 1977 over 640 workers were employed there; it was the third largest employer in the city. The facilities now catering to the busy interstate highway traffic would be quite a surprise for the Mason and Luzena Wilson who were pioneer innkeepers along the stagecoach road.

The Nut Tree acquired a post office and in 1955 built the private Nut Tree Airport to accommodate plane buffs and flying clubs. (The airport retained its name, but it became a county facility in 1970.) The food at the Nut Tree restaurant continued to be superb, and diners came from many places to enjoy the excellent fare.

In 1971, to celebrate the restaurant's fiftieth anniversary, Robert H. Power and Helen Harbison Power restored the Harbison House on the Nut Tree grounds. Josiah Allison first settled this ranch property in 1855 and constructed a house there. Ten years later a second dwelling replaced the first, and, in 1906, Luther J. Harbison built the present Harbison House at a cost of $6,000. The lovely restored garden, the house, and its furnishings provide an excellent history of the California fruit ranch from 1870 to 1928.

Basic Vegetable Products has continued to be a leading company in the manufacturing field in Vacaville. Dried onion and garlic production thrived, and by 1977, with 620 workers, BVP was the fourth largest source of employment for the city. Other important companies were American Home Foods (canned vegetables and specialties), Coachmen Industries (construction of recreation vehicles), Lucky Distribution warehouse (food and sundries), Pacific Gas and Electric Company (utilities), Rico Publishing Company (newspaper), and the



The Harbison House, built in 1906, is one of the few extant fruit-era ranch homes.

Solano Irrigation District (irrigation). These companies together accounted for about 3,325 jobs, or nearly 40 percent of the work force.

Agricultural Growth

Farm production around Vacaville also took on new dimensions in the postwar era. Dairying had been a significant component of Solano County agriculture since the nineteenth century. After 1945, it grew even more important as a consequence of urban growth in the San Francisco Bay Area and surrounding communities. Most herds fed on the grasslands east of Vacaville, but some herds also were located in the hills to the west. Milton and Truman Dykes operated a dairy ranch in Lagoon Valley on the same land that Edwin Markham had ploughed as a boy in the 1860s. The Dykes sold milk to both the Borden Company in Oakland and the two major retail milk companies in Vacaville, one operated by Bert Wykoff and the other by Rudy Werner.

Having learned the dairy trade in his native Switzerland before coming to Vacaville, Werner and his partner, Walter Brehme, took over a defunct dairy near Elmira during the Depression and built it into the Vaca Valley Creamery, the largest dairy and ice cream business in the area. During the Second World War their plant, located on the north side of Main Street across from the Triangle Building, supplied all the milk products for the Travis Air Force Base. In the postwar period, Werner and Brehme expanded into upper Solano and Yolo counties, and at one time as many as thirteen trucks delivered Vaca Valley Creamery products to local homes.

While most fruit trees that survived the Depression gave way to urban development soon after the war, a few Vaca Valley orchards lasted longer. The old Ulatis orchard near Bucktown remained until the early 1970s, when Yoshio Nakatani uprooted it to plant row crops. In the latter days of the Depression Robert B. Hawkins, grandson of one of the community's earliest pioneers, developed a mail-order dried fruit business that was especially popular in eastern homes during the Christmas holiday season. During the war one customer wrote with some urgency: "What about more peaches? Can they be sent legally? They were fine." His name was William Allen White, the famous Kansas journalist. He was worried about the impact of OPA price ceilings, but he got his peaches. Hawkins' "Vaca Valley Orchards" prospered into the 1950s, employing up to 200 local workers at the peak of the season. As had happened so often in the past, a disastrous packinghouse fire finally ended the Hawkins' business.

By World War II, despite the efforts of Hawkins and a few other orchardists, commercial fruit operations in the Vacaville area had shriveled to a small percentage of Solano County farm productivity. Much more important were row crops, such as peas, celery, and tomatoes, all of which were grown east of Vacaville by the late 1930s. In 1941 Clem Hartley pioneered green tomato production in the English Hills. After the war he expanded his vegetable-processing plant and opened a fresh apricot packing and shipping facility in Winters. Vegetable production attracted other processors, including the giant American Home Food Products plant near Allendale, which covered ten acres and employed up to 700 during the tomato season. However, the day of the grower and farm laborer had clearly passed, and current labor statistics show no more than 5 per cent employed as laborers or agricultural workers in the city and in the county.

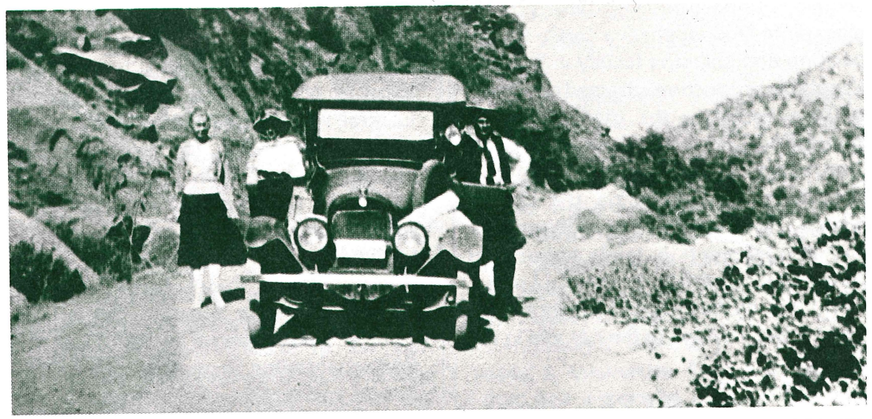
Water Problems and Projects

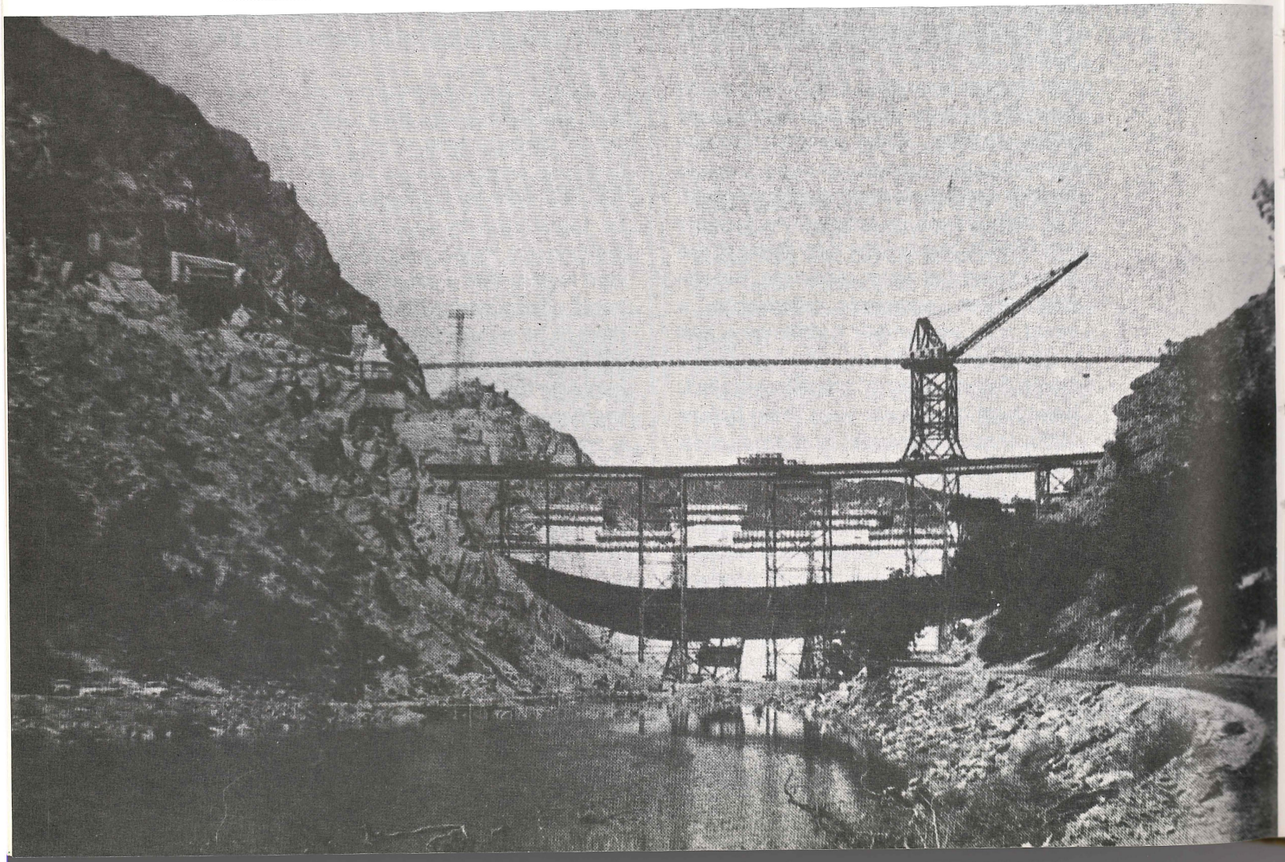
Row crops and huge processing plants—indeed, the bulk of postwar agriculture and related industries in Solano County—could not have developed without new water supplies. Water was the ultimate resource that made modern Solano County agriculture and industry possible. For half a century progressive farmers had tried to reclaim the land through the development of water resources, but obstructionism, economic catastrophe, a world war, and public indifference had worked against those who wanted a major Solano County irrigation project. Had irrigation come to Vaca Valley before 1930, local commercial fruit production might have survived the Depression and the outside competition. But by the 1940s fruit was secondary to vegetables as a key element in Solano County's economic future, and county leaders began to marshal the forces necessary to make expanded farm production possible.

Solano County's irrigation potential was more than a topic of local conversation by the 1940s. During the development of plans for the federally funded Central Valley Project, some state water officials discussed the possibility of bringing upper Sacramento River water to Solano via Lindsay Canal. But local irrigation leaders had a better plan, and, to develop a political power base for its implementation, they induced the board of supervisors to organize the Solano County Water Council in 1940. Not the first organization to promote Solano irrigation, but certainly the most important, the council became the leading advocate for a high dam at Devil's Gate in Putah Canyon.

Putah Creek advocates had science and technology on their side. Annual runoff records, kept since 1900, proved that the creek yielded an average of 375,000 acre-feet of water, which could be transferred by gravity flow through inexpensive canals to almost every adjacent region that wanted it. On the other hand, Sacramento River water would have to be pumped in at high cost. True, placing a high dam at Devil's Gate would inundate the little town of Monticello and the Berryessa Valley, but it would create a reservoir that could hold up to 2.2 million acre-feet of water, enough to irrigate at least 300,000 acres and still leave abundant surplus for domestic consumption, military use, wildlife conservation, and other projects. Clearly Putah Creek was a superior water source.

After the war the Water Council took up the Putah Creek dam with renewed





energy and with growing confidence. By that time two federal agencies had also become interested in Putah Creek. In 1943 the Army Corps of Engineers proposed building a low dam at Devil's Gate for flood control and limited irrigation. A year later the Bureau of Reclamation, after a new survey of California irrigation prospects, issued a report recommending a series of dams along both Putah and Cache creeks in Yolo County. Impounded water from both creeks would flow by a series of canals and tunnels into a common reservoir which would probably meet all future anticipated Solano and Yolo irrigation needs. By attracting national attention, these proposals helped promote regional irrigation, but they also muddied the waters of Putah Creek, so to speak, by bringing two contradictory new plans before the public.

Soon more plans surfaced, and as the planning grew more complex the waters got muddier. Yolo County supervisors, for instance, decided Indian Valley was a dam site better than Devil's Gate—at least for Yolo purposes. A group of Napa and Vallejo residents proposed a low level dam at Coyote Valley that would store enough water for domestic use in Napa and lower Solano counties. The main argument in favor of this approach was that it would not flood 12,000 acres of farmland in the Berryessa Valley. At least one environmentalist proclaimed Putah Canyon, with its beautiful hundred-year-old oak trees, a scenic wonderland and demanded that the state convert the canyon into a park.

Despite these complications, the Water Council and the Solano County Board of Supervisors stuck to the idea of a single high dam to be constructed by the Bureau of Reclamation and paid for through user fees over a fifty-year period. Learning the fine art of high-pressure lobbying was not easy for lifelong farmers, ranchers, and businessmen like Edwin Uhl, John Rico, Monte Gates, Frank Gonzales, Max Brazelton, Henry Rogers, Bert Wykoff, Frank J. Douglass, George Akerley, and the other advocates of the plan, but learn they did as the debate progressed. They and their fellow lobbyists from Dixon, Elmira, Fairfield, and Suisun sent petitions to Congress, prepared campaign buttons and bumper stickers, hired sound trucks, and sent motor caravans throughout the county to help "educate" other Solano residents on the need for a high dam. Most important, they led the drive to organize the 60,000-acre Solano Irrigation District (SID), which early in 1948 won overwhelming approval from owners of farmland in the five subdivisions of the district—Dixon, Vacaville, Tolenas, Fairfield, and Elmira. The SID became the official voice of upper Solano irrigation proponents, and it became the legal authority governing the project after it was constructed.

Construction was still a long way away in 1948, and SID members had to work

Alice (left), Adele, and Roy Hilden toured Devil's Gate forty years before construction began on Monticello Dam in 1956.

harder than ever to win congressional approval. Soon after the SID was organized, Representative Leroy Johnson and Senator Sheridan Downey introduced identical high dam appropriation bills in Congress. Both advocates and opponents exaggerated the issues as the debate wore on. County Supervisor Frank O. Bell told a House subcommittee that Solano County was in "imminent danger of a severe water shortage" because of rapid postwar expansion. Governor Earl Warren, a long-time high dam enthusiast, stressed the urgency of construction to keep Travis Air Force Base, Mare Island Navy Yard, and the Benicia Arsenal from running dry, although Napa County opponents said the military installations could easily be supplied from existing water systems.

Not to be outdone, the Vacaville City Council sent a resolution to Congress that sounded desperate indeed: "future development and progress of Vacaville and its surrounding area," said the document, "is virtually at a standstill because of the lack of water for irrigation, domestic and industrial purposes." Two years later they sent essentially the same message, despite the steady growth that had taken place in the meantime.

More realistic were the predictions based on a thorough study of the agricultural potential of Solano County. In at least a dozen trips to Washington as the Water Council's chief lobbyist, Ed Uhl convinced key members of Congress that the Solano project was not just another boondoggle. The Monticello Dam, he argued, would provide flood control and prevent waste; water from Lake Berryessa would triple agricultural production in Solano County, satisfy domestic needs, and benefit far more people than would be hurt by flooding Berryessa Valley. After one long round of testimony, he was gratified to hear a Senate committee member exclaim: "Gentlemen, this is a gold-plated project. If you don't go for this, God help the rest of the projects in California!"

Just as Congress seemed about ready to act, more trouble erupted at home. Led by Elmer H. Schroeder and James Fulmor of Dixon, a farmers' committee within the SID staged a revolt that threatened to undo the entire project. Always wary of high water rates, but willing to go along if the government kept rate schedules low, they rebelled in 1950 after the Bureau of Reclamation published figures estimating that Solano irrigators—85 percent of the water users in the project—would have to pay $3.80 per acre-foot, not including the cost of the Putah South Canal distribution system. Joining with the old Napa County opposition, the committee circulated petitions calling for dissolution of the SID.

To avert an eleventh hour disaster, high dam advocates scaled down the plan to make the costs more acceptable. Originally wanting a reservoir holding 2.2 million acre-feet, they accepted a compromise proposal for a capacity of 1.6 million acre-feet and a smaller distribution system. That action helped keep the SID intact long enough for Congress to take final action. The Korean War stalled the project another three years,

but Congress funded the initial construction in 1953. At last Solano had a dam at Devil's Gate—nearly sixty years after it was first proposed.

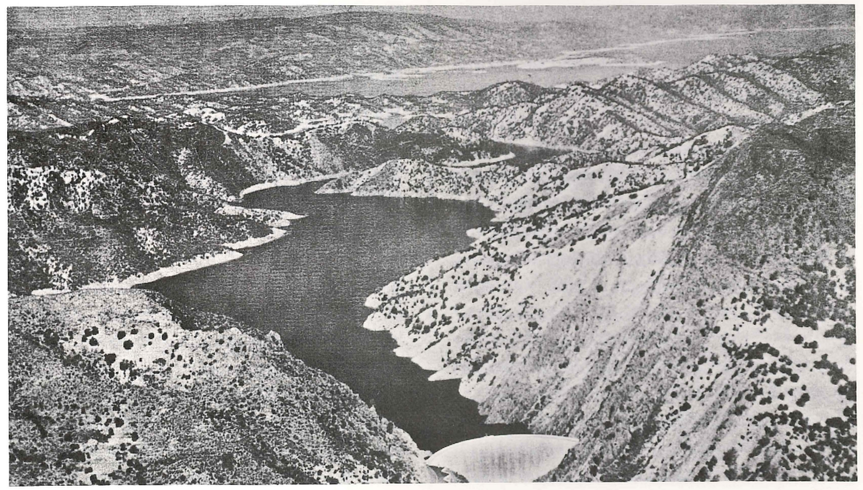
The Monticello Dam was completed in 1957 with a storage capacity in Lake Berryessa of 1,602,000 acre-feet of water. The dam lies eighteen miles from Vacaville, which was one of the several bodies that gained water allotments along with Fairfield, Suisun City, Benicia, the California Medical Facility, the University of California at Davis, and the Maine Prairie Water District. County agriculture, particularly tomatoes and sugar beets, began to benefit heavily in the 1960s from this supplemental water supply, and agricultural income rose significantly as a result. Lake Berryessa became a most attractive and popular recreation park area for Californians.

By 1970, a Vacaville general plan stated that existing sources of water would be adequate for the following fifteen or twenty years. This estimate took into account the expansion of the city and its population, and it looked optimistically toward future new sources of water. City water came from four wells, two city reservoirs, a contract with the Solano Irrigation District for water from the Berryessa reservoir, and new sources of supply in the planning stage. Even during the 1976–1977 drought, very little water had to be imported from Lake Berryessa.

Housing

New water supplies, new business, new services, new ways of using the land,

Lake Berryessa, behind Monticello Dam, is one of the state's largest man-made lakes.

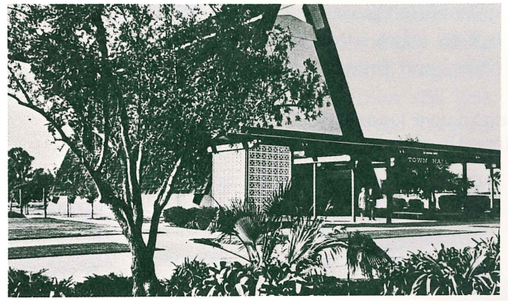


new opportunities for work and play—all these contributed to Vacaville's postwar growth. Most important, growth meant people, newcomers who "discovered" Vacaville and wanted to make it a part of their lives. Regardless of how they came or why, the new arrivals placed enormous burdens on city services and complicated a housing shortage that had persisted since the Second World War began. City officials tried to meet these challenges both with stopgap measures and long-range planning, but often the stopgaps contradicted and overruled the plans. Orderly development was imperative, however, and the city developed a number of "general plans" in 1946, 1958, and 1970; adopted a growth management system plan in 1977; and planned a number of cooperative activities with county governments and regional, state, and federal agencies.

Local housing and annexation patterns indicated the wave of the future. Housing needs had top priority by 1945. The Federal Housing Authority homes and public housing units that had been constructed during the war helped a little, but the tide of postwar expansion swept up every living space in sight and called for emergency measures to ease the shortage. Early in 1946 Vacaville officials drew up plans for the construction of 150 temporary, low-cost homes for returning veterans and their families to be financed by the Federal Public Housing Authority, but FPHA representatives rejected the plans on grounds that postwar economic reconversion would cause layoffs in regional war industries and reduce the pressure on existing homes. Many local service clubs and public agencies protested the decision, but to no avail.

Private developers, however, had more confidence in Vacaville's future and a more realistic picture of immediate needs. They opened up new subdivisions south and west of the city as fast as land and building materials could be obtained. While local officials bickered with the FPHA, James Caughy, Jr., secured a portion of the Wilson Ranch along Walnut Street and Lovers Lane south of Merchant Street. In 1946 he started work on thirty-nine homes, and the next year he added more. Vaca Valley Village, located on a section of the old Parker orchard south of Merchant Street, was the first major subdivision added to the city since the Buck Addition in the thirties. Samuel R. Geddes and James J. Smith, two Napa contractors, began work on the 107-unit project late in 1946. The city annexed the subdivision just before its completion in 1948. Later that year Geddes and Smith opened Vaca Valley Village No. 2, a twenty-three unit extension which, when completed, pushed the southwestern urban perimeter of the city to Highway 40. Additional subdivisions rose to serve the influx of population, and in 1977 there were a total of fourteen suburban residential areas in the Vacaville community.

While working families made up most of the postwar population growth, part of the new influx consisted of senior citizens who wanted to retire in an inexpensive and quiet setting convenient to major urban areas. Vacaville met all their requirements and more, for once again the beauty of the land caught the eye of immigrants. So attractive was the setting that in 1963 two developers, C.M. Syar and Harms Brothers Investment Company organized "Leisure Town," the first functioning adult community in northern California. Located across Interstate 80 from the Nut Tree on land owned by John Freitas, this retirement village added talented and well-traveled residents to the population of Vacaville. It was subsequently annexed by the city, and by 1970 Leisure Town was the city's largest subdivision with 450 single dwellings and 74 duplex units.



The community center at Leisure Town

Public Services and Public Planning

Vacaville residents after World War II followed patterns their pioneer ancestors established when they pushed back the wilderness to make room for immigrants from the East. But urban growth had much greater impact on the environment than farm expansion had a century earlier, and by the 1940s citizens expected much more from all levels of government than the frontier farmers had. As Vacaville grew, so did the needs and demands of the people who crowded into Vaca Valley. To meet those increasing needs and demands, the city of Vacaville had to expand its public services.

To get a handle on urban sprawl was the first order of business. The city had established a planning commission during the war, and in 1946, under the direction of Chairman Jack Hume, it undertook Vacaville's first general plan. An ambitious proposal keyed to the idea that Main Street should remain the town's commercial center, it called for modernizing the downtown area by razing old buildings and adding new parking facilities, widening the major streets and bridges, giving Main Street buildings a facelift, strictly regulating subdivision development, rezoning the entire city, and turning the old Oriental district into a public park surrounding a new city hall.

According to Leila McKevitt, who served fifteen years on the commission, and whose written reminiscences are on file at UC Davis, a Sacramento consultant laid down three principles that the commission tried to follow: keep Main Street between Davis and Dobbins the heart of the business district, channel subdivision growth to the north to prevent crossing the state highway and raising the cost of city services, and inhibit the development of shopping centers without an adequate population base. The formula sounded good to a few progressive business and political

leaders, but landlords, speculators, and taxpayers felt it was both extravagant and an imposition on classic private property rights. Given this lack of support, the 1946 plan got nowhere. So unpopular was the proposal that when the city council met in 1948 to consider a new zoning ordinance that designated large parts of the city's residential district to commercial use in contradiction to the principles laid down in 1946, witnesses did not raise a single objection.

Ten years later the planning commission again tried to rehabilitate Main Street and channel growth into Vaca Valley, which they expected to be covered with houses in a few years. Their findings were published in the "Vacaville Area General Plan" in 1958. By the mid-1950s urban sprawl was more visible, and its impact on the old downtown area more apparent. As the commercial heart of the city shifted south and west, it was clear that a great deal of the historical core—the area bounded by Mason, West, Monte Vista, and Depot Streets—had fallen to absentee landlords; low-rent houses, apartments, and shops; and second-class bars. A few leading merchants remained, along with Ulatis School and the two major lodges, but as conditions deteriorated they demanded a cleanup.

In response the city council established the Vacaville Urban Renewal Agency, headed by Douglas Thompson. Concluding that the key to redevelopment was to clear away the old buildings and attract large chain stores to the core area, agency officials solicited both outside businesses and federal funds. They got neither. Some new chains moved in, but to more attractive commercial districts, and federal officials felt the area was not sufficiently blighted to qualify for slum clearance money. In addition, some landlords held out for higher prices than redevelopment agents were willing to pay, and cooperation turned into confusion as both sides started slinging mud. Fed up with the whole mess, voters turned out the city council that had supported redevelopment and elected a new set of officials. That ended efforts to salvage Main Street—at least for the time being.

The Triangle Building, one of Vacaville's most distinctive landmarks. Completely remodeled inside, its bay windows and cornice have not changed in seventy-five years.

Fire Protection

Expansion of public services proceeded despite the controversy over urban planning and development. Better fire protection was imperative as newcomers settled in the neighboring hills and valleys. In 1946 voters established a fire protection district outside the city limits as a first step in upgrading regional service, but volunteer firemen still had no regular budget and often had to purchase equipment out of their own pockets. Even after Vacaville began to develop a full-time professional department in 1956, men and equipment were so limited that until the sixties only emergency calls could be handled.

The greatest fire emergency in recent Vacaville history occurred on Thursday, September 16, 1965, when a huge range fire devastated many square miles going past the city. Range fires were nothing new to Solano County with its ample, dry summer grass. Started in the early days by lightning or by Indians who used fire to drive game, and later by children, careless ranch hands, or the sparks from

Warren Hughes, Vacaville's first paid fire chief, began his full-time duties in 1956 after serving several years as volunteer chief. "The volunteers were a good fire company," he recalls. "If I was fire chief today, I would ten times rather have a good volunteer department than a paid department." He cites the relative freedom from red tape and the high caliber of men as reasons for this conviction. "One thing about a volunteer department: you get all walks of life. You get doctors, lawyers, welders, mechanics, carpenters, any kind you want. If you wanted to do something you just set out and did it." But one major drawback was the lack of a budget. "As a volunteer department," he reflects, "you got what you could beg for. If you wanted a piece of hose, you had to go to the city council and get down on your knees." Once he asked for money to buy some new decking on the tailboard of the old Seagraves firetruck, now a museum piece in storage. "When we bought it in 1929 it had a wooden deck, and after it got old one of my big guys stuck his foot through it. I was asking for a piece of metal to put on the back. We were going to do the work ourselves. I just wanted them to buy the metal, and one of the councilmen asked me if I thought we needed it. That's how tough it was."

a passing locomotive, range fires swept over the hills and valleys almost every year with little property damage on most occasions.

As ranches gave way to orchards and orchards to subdivisions, the potential for disaster increased enormously. Most destructive were autumn range fires fed by gale force northerly winds. The "Black Thursday" fire in 1965 is the most recent example. Touched off near Allendale by electric wires that blew together and arced, the fire traveled south at speeds of sixty-five to seventy miles an hour, burning everything in its path. It jumped across Interstate 80 with ease and did its worst damage on Travis Air Force Base, where it was finally contained. Miraculously, no one was hurt, although sixty-five buildings were lost.

Schools

Postwar planning included provisions for new schools. They were much easier to finance than urban redevelopment. Late in 1945, after a successful bond election, Vacaville built its first modern elementary facility, Elm School. Located on an eight-acre site that was once part of the Parker orchards, the new school was the pride and joy of Superintendent Kenneth Glines, whose dynamic efforts for school improvements left a permanent mark on Vacaville. Now the new southwest subdivisions had a school, but elsewhere classroom space remained scarce. By 1949 the school shortage was critical, especially after the outlying elementary districts of Alowen, Brown's Valley, Center, Cooper, Elmira, Oakdale, Peaceful Glen, and Rhine closed their one-room schoolhouses and joined the new Vaca Valley Union District. Neither Elm School nor the old Ulatis School on "College Hill" could handle the glut, and for several years some students met in temporary classrooms scattered across town.

Once a rural school—now a residence

At the high school level things were even worse. Not only were classrooms overcrowded, but also the buildings on the old college campus were unsafe. Late in 1949 the state architect inspected the structures. He found dry rot in the once handsome, but now dilapidated, wooden classroom building. The foundation of the brick gymnasium was shaky too. A year later, after voters approved two bond issues, school trustees constructed a new facility for Vaca High School and a new Monte Vista elementary school on a thirty-acre site a mile east of the old campus on land where Ed Uhl had once raised fruit. The last high school students moved to the new site in 1952, and it was well that they did because a year later a fire destroyed the old brick gymnasium.

By 1977, the enrollment of students in the Vacaville Unified School District had risen to 8,383 children, a far cry from the tens or hundreds of young people that had to be educated in the early decades after the founding of the town. School authorities knew also that if the population of the city continued to grow, the possibility existed that by 1985-1986 enrollment could rise another 50 percent. Today the facilities to handle this educational challenge consist of ten elementary schools, two junior high schools, and one high school. Some of these schools carry familiar names from the past in Vacaville—Alamo, Elmira, Markham, Ulatis, Willis Jepson, and others. Most of these facilities are near their capacities and some are already overcrowded, so local educators continue to face the historical challenge to serve growing local demands with limited resources.

Parks and Recreation

When Vaca High School was moved from its site on "College Hill," an old park and beautification plan was revived after nearly half a century. Back in the 1890s, town trustees, nudged by the newspaper editor and the Ladies' Improvement Club, bought most of the land on the

Vacaville High School on College Hill. Abandoned in 1952, it burned a year later.

college site and passed an ordinance declaring portions of the land to be a public park. No improvements were made, however, and by 1900 the trustees had bowed to stronger pressures. They turned part of the land over to the high school district, and the remainder eventually became the location of an expanded Ulatis elementary school. For fifty years Vacaville did without a public park, much to the chagrin of the Saturday Club, the Chamber of Commerce, and other local boosters.

After World War II, park proponents gained the upper hand. Although they failed at first to implement the park design written into the 1946 general plan, city officials were stirred to action by a $2,500 bequest from Edward C. Andrews, whose Vacaville **Reporter** had been one of the leaders of the park movement in the 1890s. After the high school moved, the city council purchased land on College Hill to build a central park. Eventually the city tore down most of the remaining buildings, landscaped the grounds, built a band shell, and the 5.7-acre Andrews Park was gradually developed during the 1950s. With its picnic tables, and baseball diamond, the park is Vacaville's only central public recreation area, although general plans are laid for future neighborhood, community, and citywide recreation and park facilities as the city grows.

Alarmed by rising delinquency statistics, service clubs were especially anxious to improve athletic and recreational facilities for young people. After some prodding by the Rotarians and the press, civic agencies in 1946 organized a youth council under the chairmanship of high school instructor Carroll Mundy. Funded initially by private contributions and operated by volunteers, the council established a youth center, which became headquarters for the Boy Scouts, the Girl Scouts, the Red Cross, and the Future Farmers of America.

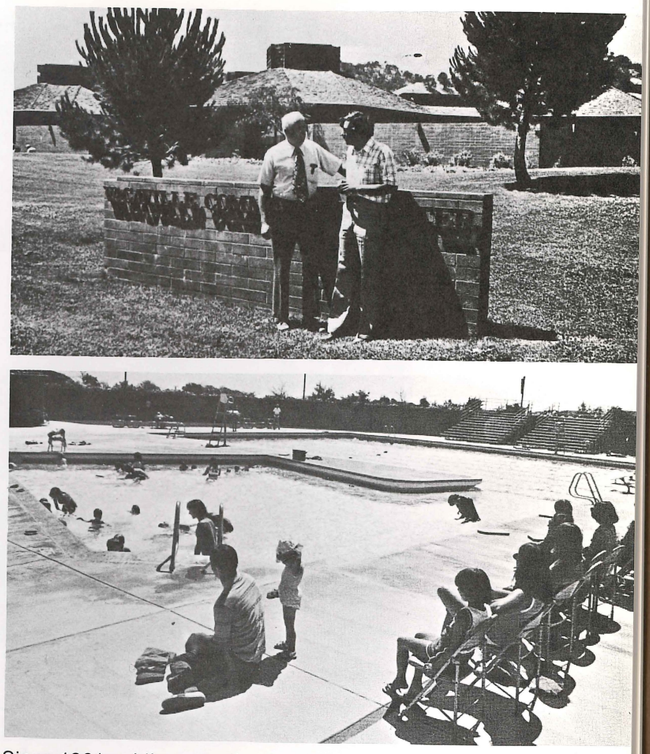
The council also hired a part-time recreation director to organize and coordinate a summer program. Otto Meyers, the first director, developed a remarkably diversified program that included basketball, softball, ski trips, doll shows, folk dancing, bingo, jitterbug contests, bicycle meets, ice skating parties, and ladies' bowling. Most volunteer time and effort went into developing athletic fields at local school grounds and improving the Youth Center, which in the early 1950s moved from Merchant Street to a quonset hut erected by the Future Farmers behind the old high school on College Hill.

The youth council received a significant economic boost in 1955 when the city reorganized it into a recreation commission. Now it was publicly funded for the first time, and it also drew modest support from the elementary and high school districts and the city treasury. The city gradually took on more of the burden, hiring John A. McBride as the first full-time Park and Recreation Director in 1961. While the city took over the major responsibility for parks and recreation, the school districts continued to help support the programs with funds for another decade. "That was a lot of fun,"

McBride recalled, "trying to keep three agencies happy on a single budget."

Public recreation in Vacaville got its biggest break in 1971 when the city council added a tax of eighty dollars on new home construction. The money went into a recreation fund to pay for park and recreation development. This "bedroom tax" made possible the enormous expansion of programs to include everything "from the tiny tots' preschool programs right up through a wonderful senior citizens' program," in the words of Park Director McBride. The Community Center, built on a ten-acre site carved out of an old orchard, is an outstanding example of what has been done in recent years to improve the public resources of Vacaville. As if to make up for years of neglect, the city now has an $800,000 park and recreation capital improvement program, most of it funded by the bedroom tax. The most ambitious general recreation project yet is the Lagoon Valley regional park, which will be partially funded by the tax and by the county. It is in the planning stage and is expected to be ready for full use by 1981.

Eleanor Nelson, a teacher at Vacaville High School, was one of the leading figures in the development of recreational programs in Vacaville. Her leadership began in the forties with the initiation of community recreational programs, and in the succeeding years her efforts contributed immensely to the organization of a comprehensive city recreation program. Ultimately, she served on a city Recreation Commission, and in 1978 the auditorium of the community center was named the Eleanor Nelson Room in her honor.



Since 1961 public recreation has been led by John McBride (top left) and Ron Mikalis.

An offshoot of these recreation efforts was the initiation of Fiesta Days in Vacaville. The program grew out of the California centennial celebrations of 1948–1950 that honored the gold rush, statehood, and the founding of the town of Vacaville in 1950. After sponsoring an outstanding float in the 1948 gold rush

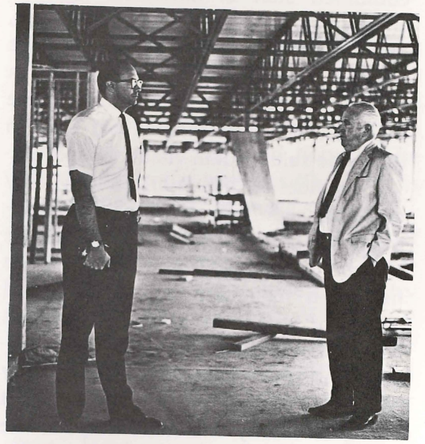
Fiesta Days, held every spring, began in the 1940s and still attract a colorful crowd.

celebration, Vacaville service clubs followed up with a two-day series of concerts, parades, dances, and baseball games. The events were such a success that an allied council of service clubs was organized to coordinate future centennial activites. Representing the youth council, Rotary, the fire department, the VFW, and the chamber of commerce, the new group sponsored a Vacaville centennial fiesta in 1950, and it was the largest and most profitable event ever held in the city to that time. Combining good business and community spirit, the organization decided to continue Fiesta Days as an annual city event. Now the event is sponsored each spring by the chamber of commerce, and its popularity continues to be very high.

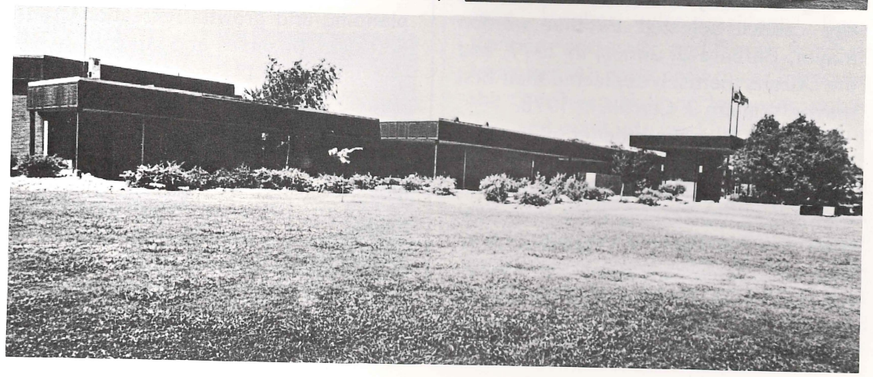
City Government

The postwar profusion of new services added immensely to the quality of life in Vacaville, but the delivery of these services required a refinement in the structure and even in the nature of city government. In 1954 the Citizens Committee for Civil Betterment, under the leadership of Richard Coffer, anticipated that changes were soon to take place by calling for a "business administration" headed by a city manager. Feeling the limitations of a city government run by a mayor and committees within the city council, the committee wanted to create and staff separate departments for recreation, sewage, streets, planning, and police and fire protection, each under specialists supervised by the city manager. They also urged Vacaville to build for a better future by safeguarding water supply, expanding recreation facilities, constructing a new civic center, and building other public facilities.

Despite the visionary sound of these proposals, most of them were accomplished within the following two decades. By 1967, when Vacaville celebrated its seventy-fifth anniversary as an incorporated city, it had an annual budget of



City Hall in its planning, construction, and completed stages



$2.4 million, part of which was earmarked for a new city hall and police facility. This was located on the old federal housing grounds on Merchant Street, which the city had taken over in the 1950s. The office of city manager —first occupied by Robert H. Meyer—was functioning under Walter V. Graham, who served a five-member city council and six separate city agencies with a combined staff of ninety-six full-time employees. In his anniversary message, Mayor A.T. Chancellor enumerated the tangible features of recent growth in Vacaville, including a population of more than 20,000. "Vacaville is old only in time," he said, "not in vitality or spirit."

Evidence of this spirit and vitality could be seen in a number of developments in the late 1960s and 1970s. The city council evolved from a body that was heavily a male and business-oriented group of people to a body of officials who looked more broadly to the problems and solutions to growth and quality of life for the total community. After a string of twenty-one male mayors, the city council selected its first woman mayor, Barbara J. Jones, in 1977, and the citizens themselves elected their first mayor, William J. Carroll, in 1978.

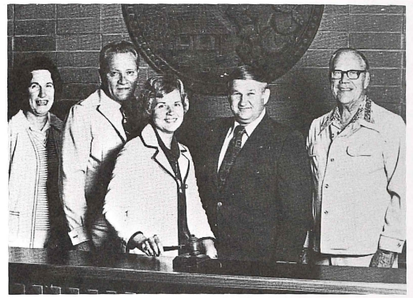
Not only were the broader interests of the people being more closely represented and consulted, but the citizens themselves were taking more interest in their city. In 1975, a "Vacaville Community Congress Questionnaire" was distributed to residents to elicit their views and wishes in education, community services and city agencies, social issues, planning and growth, recreation, transportation, business and industry, health and environment, and city appearance. Some 3,265 questionnaires were returned and studied, and the views of the citizens were incorporated in the community's ongoing planning.

In 1977 the city council under Mayor Barbara J. Jones moved to adopt a "Growth Management System" to assure an orderly approach to both the quality and the rate of city growth. The system aimed at keeping abreast of expanding

MAYORS OF VACAVILLE

1892–1900, F.H. Buck, Sr.
1900–1906, D.K. Corn
1906–1907, S.P. Dobbins
1907–1908, F.B. McKevitt, Sr.
1908–1910, W.B. Parker, Jr.
1910–1911, W.S. Killingsworth
1911–1913, George A. Arnold
1913–1914, C.J. Uhl
1914–1915, W.L. Strong
1915–1916, George P. Akerly
1916–1918, George H. Sharpe
1918–1922, George A. Arnold
1922–1932, Rolla Gray
1932–1934, C.J. Uhl
1934–1940, E.F. Cox
1940–1944, R.C. Werner
1944–1950, C.M. Hartley
1950–1958, Albert Porter
1958–1962, Roy J. Cobble
1962–1965, Noland J. Bagley
1965–1971, Roy E. Brown
1972–1977, William J. Carroll
1977–1978, Barbara J. Jones
1978– William J. Carroll

Vacaville Mayor William J. Carroll



City councilmembers (from left) Van Loo, Gilley, Jones, Carroll, and Hassing

City Clerk Corinne L. Grannen

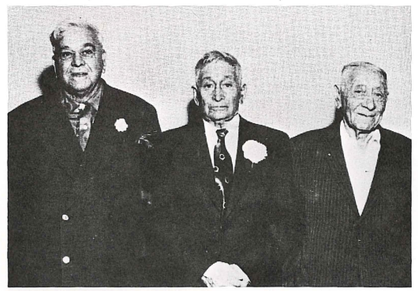
public needs while maintaining an attractive, desirable city that balanced rural atmosphere for its residents, industry to ensure jobs, and intelligent use of resources to protect its economic base.

Historical Preservation

The 1975 community questionnaire was designed for twentieth-century concerns of urbanization, but it reflected attitudes that went back to the town that grew from one square mile in 1850. Eighty percent of the respondents felt it was important to maintain the rural atmosphere of the past, and 72 percent felt that the city should encourage the renovation of historic buildings and homes. The attachment to the past was clear, and its base in the popular thinking strong.

Reflecting that outlook, a body of Vacaville people had formed the Vacaville Heritage Council in June 1969 to try to halt the continuing loss of historical materials and create proper records for materials that could still be located and preserved. The first fifteen-member group elected Arthur Dietz president, Bert Hughes vice-president, Betty Lorenzo secretary, and Frank Pritchett treasurer. An early project was to restore the Old Town Hall, no longer in public use, and put it into working order for the Heritage Council's use. The council continues to use the facility for its present group of about twenty active members. Early members who carry on the important work of nurturing historical awareness are Bert Hughes, Robert Allen, Vera and Clyde Fadley, Jane LoPolito, and Gene Vallejo. The Old Town Hall itself

Members of the Vaca, Peña, and Berryessa families gathered at the dedication of the Peña Adobe in Lagoon Valley in 1967



Above: the Jesús and Luciana Peña family—Andrea, Clara, Juanita, Narcissa, Thomas. Below: Galvino, Jesús, and Antonio, grandsons of the pioneer.

was put on the National Register of Historic Places through the action of members Melodie Beelard and Cliff Brisbee.

Concern for historical preservation has existed for a long time in the Vacaville area. For example, the original Peña family home has survived and is a widely cherished connection with the early history of Vacaville.

The portion of the Juan Felipe Peña lands on which the family adobe stood was inherited in 1859 by his daughter, Nestora Peña. While the Vaca family descendants moved to the northern part of Solano County and into Yolo County, Nestora and her brother, José Demetrio Peña, continued to live and be active in the original area of the Peña lands. Nestora married Jesús Tapia Rivera in 1881, and she held her 1,000 acres of the original land grant and lived on at the Peña Adobe until 1918.

The forty-two acres containing the Peña Adobe went to Nestora's niece, María Dolores (Peña) Lyon, and the Lyon family sold them to county supervisors, Delbert Mowers and William Goheen, in 1957. They in turn gave one and one-half acres, including the Peña Adobe, to the Solano County Historical Society. In 1961 the adobe site was transferred to the City of Vacaville and restoration was initiated in 1963 as a joint project of Vacaville, Solano County, the Solano County Historical Society, and the California Medical Facility, which supplied convict labor.

The restoration of the adobe was a $30,000 operation supervised by Merle Curtice from 1963 until 1966 and then

Above, left: Grandson Jacinto Vaca and wife Katherine (about 1892). Below: Their children at the Peña Adobe dedication—Mary, Cecil, John, Faustina ("Chris"), Clara. Above right: Eldest descendants of Jacinto and Katherine at 1978 reunion at Peña Adobe—Clara, Chris, Louise, Florence.

by its first curator, Rodney Rulofson. It was dedicated on June 3, 1967, at the time of the annual Vacaville Fiesta Days celebration, and members of the Vaca, Peña, and Berryessa families were all present, some family members traveling from as far away as Kansas. It was fitting that Mrs. Rose (Peña) Coombs, who was a granddaughter of Juan Felipe Peña and had lived at the adobe as a child, was present at the ceremony.

In that dedication, one of the most important and enduring historic sites from the days of the founding of the town had taken its place in the life of the city:

> The City of Vacaville has the perpetual responsibility to maintain the Peña Adobe Park as a symbol of the pioneer Mexican heritage that brought civilization to this part of California.

This was the message on the dedicatory plaque, and the city has continued to have activities there and to include it in the ambitious Lagoon Valley Park plan.

On June 10, 1978, 125 descendants of Jacinto and Katherine Vaca gathered at Peña Adobe Park for their first reunion in more than twenty years. Jacinto Vaca was a great grandson of Juan Manuel Vaca. The four eldest descendants at the reunion were Louise Sperinde of Auburn, Christina Reading of Nevada City, Florence Salazar of San Lorenzo, and Clara Pellegrini of Redwood City. A family picnic with hiking, softball, and glider rides filled the day. Arrangements were made by Nancy Methvin and Judith Blakeman of Woodland, and Jeffrey Paul of San Jose, assisted by Robert Barker of Richmond and Audrey Methvin of Woodland. They also obtained many photographs of the well-planned, well-attended, and enthusiastic reunion of this pioneer family which has spread out to live in many state communities today.

Like Vacaville itself, the Peña Adobe Park has a place in the long, impressive history of human efforts to bring the Vaca Valley under the control of the men and women who have lived there. The adobe has endured, the people have prospered, and a sense of history has been an abiding characteristic of the growth and development of the city. The message on the dedicatory plaque invites the reader to "Pause and enjoy the heritage of the hills, lake and valley which the pioneers called Laguna." In Spanish it continues, "Bienvenidos amigos caminantes a un descanso en la serenidad de este valle encantado" ("Welcome traveling friends to rest in the serenity of this enchanted valley").

Reference Sources

Part One

Several works were particularly useful in studying the general background of the period before 1851 in Vacaville. Helen Dormody Crystal's "Beginnings of Vacaville," a 1933 master's thesis at the University of California, Berkeley, has an abundance of useful information and illustrations. A broader study of the land, resources, and people of Solano County is found in William Adrian Bowen's "Evolution of a Cultural Landscape: The Valley Fruit District of Solano County, California," master's thesis, University of California, Berkeley (1966). This covers the three valleys dealt with in this book, analyzing the cultural geography and economic development of the county. An unpublished bibliography by Peter Kaplan, "Outline and Bibliography of History of the City of Fairfield," located in the Fairfield-Suisun Community Library and prepared for the Central Solano County Cultural Heritage Commission in 1976, is very thorough and includes many Vacaville items. The early subscription history by J.P. Munro Fraser, **History of Solano County** (1879), is now dated, but it has useful materials on the early period, including biographical and illustrative records. Finally, the recollections of an eyewitness observer from the earliest days of Anglo contact in the area are given in **Luzena Stanley Wilson '49er: Memories Recalled Years Later for Her Daughter Correnah Wilson Wright** (1937).

Basic studies of the Patwins of the Vacaville area remain to be written, but a great deal of useful data can be found in a number of works on California Indians, including Lowell J. Bean and Thomas C. Blackburn, eds., **Native Californians: A Theoretical Retrospective** (1974), and R.F. Heizer and M.A. Whipple, comps. and eds., **The California Indians: A Source Book** (2d ed., rev. and enl., 1971). Three important older works also have interesting information: A.L. Kroeber, **Handbook of the Indians of California** (1925); A.L. Kroeber, "The Patwin and Their Neighbors," **University of California Publications in Archaeology and Ethnology**, vol. 29, no. 4 (1932); and the classic eyewitness account of Stephen Powers, **Tribes of California** (1877, reprinted 1976).

Sherburne F. Cook studied the fateful impact of European colonization on the California Indian in several publications. An early four-part study was **The Conflict between the California Indian and White Civilization** (1943). The first three parts deal with the impact on the Indian cultures and population decline. A very important recent publication

of Cook's findings, **The Population of the California Indians 1769–1970** (1976), contains six useful essays on population.

The Bancroft Library of the University of California, Berkeley, has listings of the names of Indian neophytes and their rancherías, taken from the **Libro de Bautismos**, which recorded the baptisms of natives from the Vacaville region—Mission San Francisco de Asís, 1777–1822, Mission San José, 1797–1844, and Mission San Francisco Solano, 1824–1835. These lists were compiled by Alphonse L. Pinart. A French scientist and artist, Louis Charles Adélaïde de Chamisso (1781–1838), visited the San Francisco presidio and mission in 1816 on a Russian scientific voyage on the brig **Rurik**, and he left the only lithographs of the physical appearance of the Ululato Indians in color in his **Voyage pittoresque autour du monde** (1822). August C. Mahr translated the text from the French to English, with some additions, in **The Visit of the "Rurik" to San Francisco in 1816** (1932), and he reproduces the main sketches in black and white.

Charles E. Chapman's **A History of California: The Spanish Period** (1921) is still an authoritative statement on that early period. There are good maps and charts in Warren A. Beck and Ynez D. Haase, **Historical Atlas of California** (1974). Sherburne F. Cook published two additional works on the Spanish and provincial periods. **Colonial Expeditions to the Interior of California: Central Valley, 1800–1820** (1960) has diaries and accounts of Spanish exploration of the Solano region. Cook describes the "Miramontes Epidemic" of the provincial years in "Smallpox in Spanish and Mexican California, 1770–1845," **Bulletin of the History of Medicine**, vol. 7 no. 2 (1939).

The period of the immigration of New Mexican pioneers and of the Mexican rancho is especially well treated in several books. The background in New Mexico, the Old Spanish Trail, and the attraction of Alta California is given in LeRoy R. Hafen and Ann W. Hafen, **Old Spanish Trail: Santa Fé to Los Angeles, with Extracts from Contemporary Records** (1954). A recent book by Joyce Carter Vickery, **Defending Eden: New Mexican Pioneers in Southern California 1830–1890** (1977), studies the character and motivations of pioneers like the Vaca and Peña families and their experiences in New Mexico and California. Solano historian Wood Young gives a detailed and excellent account of the **Vaca–Peña Los Putos Rancho and the Peña Adobe** (1971), and this material has been used throughout the book. Information on the New Mexican pioneers appears in Joann Leach Larkey, comp., **Davisville '68: The History and Heritage of the City of Davis, Yolo County, California** (1969). Robert S. Smilie tells a great deal about the Mexican outpost at Sonoma in **The Sonoma Mission: San Francisco de Sonoma** (1975).

Part Two

Several of the general works cited in Part One were also used extensively in Part Two, particularly those by William A. Bowen, J.B. Munro Fraser, Luzena Stanley Wilson, and Wood Young. In addition, a number of general historical studies of California were utilized. Volume 4 of Theodore H. Hittell's **History of California**, published in four volumes from 1885 to 1898, gives useful data on early state administrations. Material about Vacaville schools is contained in William Warren Ferrier, **Ninety Years of Education in California, 1846–1936** (1937); Roy W. Cloud, **Education in California** (1952); and J.C. Simmons, **The History of Southern Methodism on the Pacific Coast** (1886). Political trends that were reflected in Vacaville and Vacaville Township are described in Winfield J. Davis, **History of Political Conventions in California, 1849–1892** (1893).

Several books deal more specifically with Vacaville and its setting within Solano County. The **Thompson & West Historical Atlas Map of Solano County, California** (1878) is excellent and contains a wealth of detail for a student of Vacaville. Tom Gregory and others published a **History of Solano and Napa Counties, California** (1912) rich in historical biography and photographs of pioneer figures, including several personalities described in Part Three.

Three studies dealing with Vacaville society in this early period were useful to this book. Calvin B. Webster's **Educational History of Solano County** (1888) added to the discussion of education in the area. Of the numerous studies of Edwin Markham, none really clarifies his life in Lagoon Valley. Louis Filler's **The Unknown Edwin Markham: His Mystery and His Significance** (1968) has a brief but good description of young Markham, and Markham's own **California the Wonderful** (1914) contains several descriptive passages that recall his brief residence near Vacaville in the 1860s. An interesting sketch about a Chinese Christian convert of the Southern Methodists at Vacaville is "Ah Lee," by O.P. Fitzgerald, in **California Sketches: New Series** (1883).

The structure of higher education at the Pacific Methodist College and the California College in the 1860s and 1870s and descriptions of administrative figures and student participants are found in the catalogues of PMC for 1863 through 1867 and 1868–69, and for the Baptist California College for 1874 through 1879, which are in the Bancroft Library at Berkeley and a few other libraries.

A great deal of information on Solano County can be gleaned from the publications of each of the ten-year national censuses. The seventh (1850), eighth (1860), ninth (1870), and tenth (1880) censuses have been used. The seventh census in 1853 also included "Population and Industry of California by the State Census for the Year 1852." Microfilm copies of each of these four censuses published by the United States National Archives contain photocopies of the handwritten schedules taken by the local census marshals—M–432, roll 36 (1850), T–7, roll 16 (1860), M–593, roll 90 (1870), and T–9, roll 83 (1880). Details of population, state or country of origin, occupation, and number and occupancy of dwellings are all to be found in this enumeration of each household.

Probably the single most productive source of information was the newspapers of Solano County in this early period. Vacaville did not have a newspaper of its own until the establishment of the **Vacaville Reporter** in 1883, so most of the news of events in the town and adjacent region came from the Benicia and especially the Suisun City newspapers. Six papers were read from microfilm in the Fairfield–Suisun Community Library (which includes the Solano County Library): the **Solano County Herald** (Benicia, 1855–1858; Suisun, 1862–1865), the **Semi-Weekly Solano Herald** (Suisun, 1863, 1866–1869); the **Solano Press** (Suisun, 1866–1867); the **Weekly Solano Republican** (Suisun, 1870–1882); and the **Solano Republican** (Suisun, 1882–1883). Complete issues are available for most, with some exceptions notably in 1859–1861.

Part Three

The best source of information on Vacaville's golden age of fruit culture was the **Vacaville Reporter** (1883 to the present). For the boom years of the 1880s, Edward J. Wickson's book **The Vacaville Early Fruit District of California** (1888) is highly informative. The **Pacific Rural Press** covers all aspects of the industry and is an excellent source of comparative data for the entire state. Production statistics and other technical information are found in various federal and state publications, including the **Transactions of the California State Agricultural Society; Statistical Reports of the California State Board of Agriculture; Reports of the California State Board of Horticulture; Official Reports of the California State Horticultural Commission;** and the reports of carlot shipments (with various titles) from the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Fruit marketing is detailed in Erich O. Kraemer and H.E. Erdman, **History of Cooperation in the Marketing of California Fresh Deciduous Fruits** (1933). A list of Vacaville fruit experimenters is found in H.M. Butterfield, **History of Deciduous Fruits in California** (reprinted from **The Blue Anchor,** July 1938). Frank McKevitt, Sr., has an interesting article on Vaca Valley fruit culture in Tom Gregory's **History of Solano and Napa Counties, California** (1912). Finally, an excellent overview of Solano's importance can be found in William Adrian Bowen, "The Evolution of a Cultural Landscape," master's thesis, University of California, Berkeley (1966).

Sources of ethnic and labor history in Vacaville include contemporary newspapers such as the **Vacaville Reporter** and the **Sacramento Bee,** and state publications such as **California and the Oriental: Japanese, Chinese and Hindus** (California State Board of Control, 1922). Good specialized studies written at times of greatest impact include Sidney Gulick, **The American Japanese Problem: A Study of the Racial Relations of the East and West** (1914); I. Iyenaga and Sato Kanoshe, **Japan and the California Problem** (1921); Eliot G. Mears, **Resident Orientals on the American Pacific Coast** (1928); and American Academy of Political and Social Science, **Chinese and Japanese in America** (1909). For more modern treatments see Robert F. Heizer and Alan Almquist, **The Other Californians: Prejudice and Discrimination under Spain, Mexico and the U.S. to 1920** (1971); and Eldon Penrose, **California Nativism: Organized Opposition to the Japanese, 1890–1912** (1973).

Articles on the growth of area railroads can be found in the newspapers of the day and in the **Bulletin of the National Railway Historical Society** and other railroad periodicals. Electric railroads are covered in George W. Hilton and John F. Due, **The Electric Interurban Railways in America** (1960). Construction data and other statistics can be found in the archives of the Southern Pacific Company in San Francisco. Also available is a short paper by Meredith Stephens, "The Vaca Valley and Clear Lake Railroad," term paper, University of California, Davis (1971).

Newspapers were the best source of information on the growth of Vacaville's business district. Pro-

motional pamphlets published by the Chamber of Commerce and other groups were also helpful. Two examples are: Vacaville Board of Trustees, **Vacaville, California, Solano County . . .** (Reporter Publishing Co., 1887?); and Solano County Board of Trade, **Solano County, California: Its Location, Topography, Etc.** (1887).

The California State Archives in Sacramento contain all city incorporation records, but the fight for incorporation is best told in the files of the **Vacaville Reporter,** the **Judicion,** and the **Vaca Valley Enterprise.** Early town laws are found in the **Book of Ordinances, 1892–1918,** and **Resolution Book No. 1** (1911–1953), in the office of the Vacaville city clerk.

Much information on Vacaville social history is contained in various subscription histories published infrequently beginning in the late 1870s. For the 1880–1920 period, see **Memorial and Biographical History of Northern California** (1891); **Men of California, 1900 to 1902** (1901); J.M. Guinn, **History of the State of California and Biographical Record of the Sacramento Valley** (1906); Gregory's **History of Solano** cited in Part Two; and Marguerite Hunt, **History of Solano County, California,** 2 vols. (1926). Voting statistics are located in the **Statement of the Vote** at the California State Archives, Sacramento, which contain county and state figures. Local newspapers give precinct coverage. A brief pamphlet, **Prunings from Vaca Valley** (Vacaville Union High School, 1931), includes biographical sketches on early residents. Early church records are scarce, although Presbyterian history is well documented in records in the possession of Walter Weir. He also has the first minute book of the Vacaville chapter of the Women's Christian Temperance Union. The files of the Solano County Historical Society **Notebook** also contain useful social and cultural items on Vacaville. On the Red Cross, the McKevitt family papers at the Vacaville Heritage Council were informative.

For a lively account of post–Civil War temperance efforts in the United States, see John Kobler, **Ardent Spirits: The Rise and Fall of Prohibition** (1973). The files of the **Vacaville Reporter** are the best sources on local temperance activity. For statewide activities see Gilman M. Ostrander, "The Prohibition Movement in California, 1848–1933," doctoral thesis, Berkeley (1957). Willard's career can be traced in **Glimpses of Fifty Years** (1889).

Personal reminiscences are an important part of Vacaville's historical resources. Most of the recorded interviews conducted as part of the research for this project have not yet been transcribed, pending funding. When completed, copies of those transcripts will be deposited with the Vacaville Heritage Council archives, in the old City Hall. For Part Three information from the following personal interviews was used: Mary (Burton) Bird, February 19, 1977; Mrs. Walter H. Buckingham and Nancy Buckingham, July 8, 1977; Georgia (Mix) Burton, July 15, 1977; Marie Cox, January 5, 1977; Lorena (Watts) Desimone, March 18, 1977; Mabel Dykes, August 1, 1977; Clement M. Hartley, February 5, 1977; Leona Johnson, March 4, 1977; Jane Lopolito, January 26, 1977; Beulah (Lurvey) McCrory, January 20, 1977; Verona (Gates) Madson, March 18, 1977; Manuel E. ("Frank") Nofuentes, January 20, 1977; Edlef Pyle, February 25, 1977; Rudolph Riehl, December 17, 21, 1976, March 5, 1977; Henry Rogers, February 18, 1977; Helen (McCrory) Shipp, March 19, 1977; Albert Stevenson, January 12, 1977; Ruth (McCrory) Storm, March 19, 1977; Marion (Weir) Vaile, February 19, 1977; Velma Wirt, January 6, 1977; Bert Wykoff, November 28, 1976; Yee Ah Chong, February 4, 12, 1977.

Part Four

Most of the information on Vacaville in the 1920s was gleaned from files of the **Vacaville Reporter.** A review of American consolidation trends in general can be found in William E. Leuchtenburg, **The Perils of Prosperity, 1914–1932** (1958). City administrative and personnel changes, as well as financial and promotional records, are located in the minute books of the City Council. For banking negotiations see the Bank of America Archives, San Francisco. On the Nut Tree, most helpful are the reminiscences of Helen (Harbison) Power and Leila McKevitt, located in the Oral History Department, Special Collections Library, University of California, Davis.

The decline of fruit culture in Solano County is treated extensively in William Adrian Bowen's "Evolution of a Cultural Landscape," master's thesis, University of California, Berkeley (1966). The **Vacaville Reporter**, from 1935 to 1942, ran a series of articles by soil conservation officials on erosion problems and solutions. Walter Weir offered information on his father's reclamation career.

Information on the Vacaville riots and the communist influence in California is found in newspaper accounts and in two theses, Donald D. Ranstead, "District 13: A History of the Activities of the California Communist Party, 1929 to 1940," University of California, Davis (1963), and Donald F. Fearis, "The California Farm Worker, 1930–1942," University of California, Davis (1971). Fearis also prepared a summary review of the Vacaville riots in 1976 for the Davis Oral History Department in the University Library.

In preparing Part Four, information was obtained from the following interviews: Bebel Alonzo, July 16, 1977; Russell Beelard, March 5, 1977; Sal Bloise, November 27, 1976; Anita (Ream) Chamberlain, March 4, 1977; Lloyd Chandler, February 12, 1977; Hellen Davis, November 26, 1976; Arthur Dietz, January 19, 1977; Clyde and Vera Fadley, December 9, 1977; Ruth (Tate) Hill, March 18, 1977; Douglas Killingsworth, March 19, 1977; Henry McFadden, July 26, 1977; Frank B. McKevitt III, June 24, 1977; Delbert and Katherine Mowers, February 12, 1977; Paul Pippo, April 1, 1977; Robert Power, January 28, 1978; John Rico, January 27, 1977; Howard Rogers, January 20, 1977; Rachael Talbot, January 12, 1977; Frank Thompson, February 18, March 18, 1977; Edwin Uhl, January 20, 1977; Walter Weir, February 19, 1977; Clyde Weldon, January 20, 1977; Michael (Mac) Zupo, January 13, 1977.

Part Five

For World War II and postwar growth, the **Vacaville Reporter** was again the best source of information. The special diamond anniversary edition (May 1967) contains extensive articles on all aspects of Vacaville since incorporation in 1892.

In 1947 the Chamber of Commerce published a useful promotional pamphlet entitled simply "Vacaville," which describes the business district and the impact of postwar growth. For Solano County modern history, see the very informative pamphlet by Wilmere Jordan Neitzel and others, "Solano County History and Government," published by the County Board of Supervisors (ca. 1966). Also useful for biographical data is Joseph McGowan's three-volume **History of the Sacramento Valley** (1961).

In an age of development and planning for growth, ample descriptive and statistical studies are available. The City of Vacaville and the County of Solano published the **Vacaville Area General Plan** (1958), a descriptive and illustrated booklet that contains much general information on the city. This modest effort was followed by a far more detailed statement, **The General Plan of the City of Vacaville and Vacaville Planning Area, Solano County, California**, in August 1970. A city and regional planning firm prepared **A Growth Management System for Vacaville, California** (July 1977). This and the "Growth Management Annual Review Report 1978," submitted by the Vacaville Planning Department in March, were most helpful in the final part of the book.

Personal interviews formed an important part of the raw material for Part Five. Those interviewed for this section include Wallace and Ethyl Brazzelton, February 19, 1977; Lester and William Burton, February 4, 1977; Neva Caplener, April 1, 1977; William Churchill, January 12, 1977; Truman Dykes, July 26, 1977; Esther (Sharpe) Eldredge, March 19, 1977; Robert J. Hawkins, June 25, 1977; Juishi Hayashi, March 5, 1977; Patrick Heffernan, February 5, 1977; Warren Hughes, January 19, 1977; James Lehman, January 26, 1977; John Lum, March 19, 1977; John A. McBride, August 9, 1977; David McCready, July 9, 1977; Carroll Mundy, July 26, August 1, 1977; Yoshio and Tatsuko Nakatani, March 5, 1977; Eleanor Nelson, January 6, 1977; Clyde Penaluna, August 2, 1977; Albert Porter, February 11, 1977; Donald Powell, August 9, 1977; Tomio Teraura, February 25, 1977; Edwin Uhl, February 4, 1977; Rudy Werner, February 18, 1977; Howard J. Wood, August 9, 1977.

Illustration Sources

facing page 1 Mrs. Galvino Peña
1 The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, California 94720
3 Holt-Atherton Pacific Center for Western Studies, University of the Pacific, Stockton, California 95211
4 The Bancroft Library
6 The Bancroft Library
7 The Bancroft Library
8 The Bancroft Library
9 The Bancroft Library
10 (top) The Bancroft Library
14 Holt-Atherton Pacific Center for Western Studies
15 The Bancroft Library
17 Joyce Carter Vickery
18 The Vacaville Heritage Council
19 Holt-Atherton Pacific Center for Western Studies
20 (top) The Bancroft Library
20 (bottom) Holt-Atherton Pacific Center for Western Studies
21 Wood Young
24 Wood Young
22–23 County of Solano
26 Holt-Atherton Pacific Center for Western Studies
28 (top) Vacaville Heritage Council
28 (bottom) Vacaville Public Library
31 (top) Holt-Atherton Pacific Center for Western Studies
31 (bottom) Vacaville Heritage Council
32 The Bancroft Library
34 Vacaville Heritage Council
35 (top) Vacaville Heritage Council
35 (bottom) Holt-Atherton Pacific Center for Western Studies
37 Vacaville Heritage Council
38 (left) Holt-Atherton Pacific Center for Western Studies
38 (right) California State Library
39 The Bancroft Library
44 Walter Hilden
46 Holt-Atherton Pacific Center for Western Studies
47 Vacaville Public Library
48–49 Vacaville Public Library
50 Holt-Atherton Pacific Center for Western Studies
51 Vacaville Public Library
52–53 Vacaville Heritage Council
54 *Weekly Solano Republican*
55 Holt-Atherton Pacific Center for Western Studies
56 (top) Holt-Atherton Pacific Center for Western Studies
56 (bottom) Vacaville Public Library
58 (top) Vacaville Public Library
58 (bottom left) Holt-Atherton Pacific Center for Western Studies
58 (bottom middle) The Bancroft Library
58 (bottom right) The Bancroft Library
60–61 Vacaville Heritage Council
61 Vacaville Public Library
64 Vacaville Heritage Council
66 Vacaville Public Library
68 The Bancroft Library
69 Vacaville Public Library
70 The Bancroft Library
72 Vacaville Public Library
74 The Bancroft Library
75 Louis Filler
77 (top) Holt-Atherton Pacific Center for Western Studies
77 (bottom) J.A.B. Fry Library, University of the Pacific
78 The Bancroft Library
82 Vacaville Public Library
84 The Bancroft Library
85 The Bancroft Library
86 The Bancroft Library
87 Vacaville Public Library
89 Louis Filler
91 The Bancroft Library
93 The Bancroft Library
96 The Bancroft Library
98 The Bancroft Library
100 The Bancroft Library
102 (top) Vacaville Public Library
102 (middle) Georgia (Mix) Burton
102 (bottom) Georgia (Mix) Burton
103 Vacaville Public Library
104 Vacaville Public Library
105 Vacaville Public Library
106–7 Vacaville Public Library
109 Anita (Ream) Chamberlain
110 Vacaville Public Library
111 Bernard Riehl
112 Vacaville Public Library
113 Vacaville Public Library
114 Vacaville Public Library
115 Paul Pippo
116 Vacaville Public Library
117 J. Howard Rogers
118 Vacaville Public Library
119 Vacaville Public Library
120 Georgia (Mix) Burton
123 Vacaville Public Library
128 Vacaville Public Library
129 Vacaville Public Library
130 Vacaville Public Library
131 Holt-Atherton Pacific Center for Western Studies
132 Holt-Atherton Pacific Center for Western Studies
135 (top) Georgia (Mix) Burton
135 (bottom) Vera Fadley
136–37 Vacaville Public Library
138 Georgia Farris
142 (top) Vacaville Public Library
142 (bottom) Anita (Ream) Chamberlain
145 Georgia (Mix) Burton
147 Vacaville Public Library
151 Vacaville Public Library
152 *Vacaville Reporter*
154 Margaret (Steiger) MacIntyre
155 Vacaville Public Library
156 Vacaville Public Library
157 *Vacaville Reporter*
158 Clyde Penaluna
160 Vacaville Public Library
163 Vacaville Public Library
164 Vacaville Public Library
166 Vacaville Public Library
170 Vacaville Public Library
172 Vacaville Public Library
174 Margaret (Steiger) MacIntyre
176 Art Dietz
178 Hellen Davis
179 Douglas Killingsworth
180 Georgia (Mix) Burton
181 Vacaville Public Library
183 Esther (Sharpe) Eldredge
185 (top) Esther (Sharpe) Eldredge
185 (bottom left) Presbyterian Church, Vacaville
185 (bottom right) *Vacaville Reporter*
189 Margaret (Steiger) MacIntyre
191 Vacaville Public Library
193 Vacaville Public Library
195 Edlef Pyle
196 Vacaville Public Library
198 Anita Corbella
199 Vacaville Public Library
200 Vacaville Public Library
202 *Vacaville Reporter*
205 Vacaville Public Library
210 (top three) Walter Hilden Collection, Vacaville Heritage Council
210 (bottom) Vacaville Public Library
212 Walter Hilden Collection, Vacaville Heritage Council
213 Walter Hilden Collection, Vacaville Heritage Council
214–15 Vacaville Public Library
216 Vacaville Public Library
218 Vacaville Public Library
219 Vacaville Public Library
220–21 The Nut Tree, Vacaville
226 *Vacaville Reporter*
227 (left) Vacaville Heritage Council
227 (right) Vacaville Public Library
229 Robert Allen
233 Walter Hilden Collection, Vacaville Heritage Council
239 Ronald H. Limbaugh
243 Ronald H. Limbaugh
244–45 Ronald H. Limbaugh
246 Carroll Mundy
249 Mrs. Frank Buck, Jr.
257 *Stockton Record*
260 Anita Morgan
262 Robert Allen
266 Carroll Mundy
269 Tomio Teraura
271 Carroll Mundy
272 *Vacaville Reporter*
273 Vacaville Heritage Council
275 Travis Air Force Base
278 Vacaville Public Library
280 City of Vacaville
281 City of Vacaville
282 California Medical Facility
283 (top) Solano County Board of Supervisors
283 (bottom) The Nut Tree
286 (top) Walter Hilden Collection, Vacaville Heritage Council
286 (bottom) *Vacaville Reporter*
289 Vacaville Planning Commission
291 Don E. Wolter, courtesy of Mildred Conn
292 City of Vacaville
294 Ronald H. Limbaugh
295 Carroll Mundy
297 City of Vacaville
298 Vacaville Public Library
299 City of Vacaville
301 City of Vacaville
302–3 Andrea Martinez
304 Juanita S. Huitt
305 Jeffrey Paul
contents page Robert Power Collection
cover Jay Moss

Name Index

A

Abella, Fr. Ramón, 12
Acosta, Ricardo, 94
Adams, Cordelia, 104
Adcock, D.W., 59
Adsit, Clayton L., 161, 162
Akerly, George P., 223, 300
Allen, Robert, 301
Alley, Omer E., 217, 218, 249, 256, 259, 260, 267, 268
Alley, Mrs. Omer E., 266
Alley, R.J., 217
Allison, Charles, 78
Allison, E. Melissa, 78
Allison, H.J., 78
Allison, Josiah, 52, 53, 54, 59, 63, 74, 81, 220, 283
Allison, O.H., 175, 194
Altimira, Fray José, 14, 15
Alumbaugh, Dr. W.E., 198
Ammons, Henry B., 35, 38, 42, 94, 101
Anderson, James W., 38, 39, 42, 74, 76, 79, 190
Andrews, Charles L., 161
Andrews, Edward C., 162, 296
Argüello, Lt. Luis, 13
Armijo, José, 16–17
Arnold, George A., 300
Attkisson, W.B., 226

B

Bagley, Noland J., 300
Bailey, A.M., 77
Bailey, Rev. Mark, 81, 83
Baker, G., 57
Baker, N., 57
Ball, Eldridge B., 207
Ball, Judge, of Winters, 255
Barcar, Raleigh, 134, 160–61, 162, 208
Barker, George F., 59, 69
Barker, Robert, 306
Bartlett, E.J., 42
Bartlett, F.J., 38
Barty, Joseph, 115
Bassford, Addie V. Laselle (Mrs. Henry A.), 86
Bassford, Henry A., 58, 59, 61, 86
Bassford, Ida C. Barker (Mrs. J.M., Jr.), 60–61, 86
Bassford, J.M, Jr., 60–61, 86, 179, 194
Bassford, Joseph M., 59, 62, 95
Bates, Harry S., 226
Bayse, Marshall M., 35
Beel, Sigmund, 189
Beelard, Melodie, 304
Beelard, Russell, 217, 223
Bell, Theodore, 179
Bell, Frank O., 288
Bellows, Mrs., 96
Bennett, E.L., 35, 42, 69
Bennett, Martha (Mrs. E.L.), 101
Bentley, Police Chief, 177
Bernard, A.P., 69, 70
Berryessa family, 302–3
Blakeman, Judith, 306
Blum, Ike, 155
Blum, Jacob, 67, 73, 95
Blum, Max, 156
Blum, Moses, 69, 70, 73, 155–56
Bolter, Homer, 277
Booth, Gov. Newton, 43
Borica, Gov. Diego, 11
Bowen, William, 62
Bowles, Alma, 239
Boyle, James T., family, 264
Bradley, Constable, 134, 135
Bradley, William L., 250
Brazelton, John W., 117
Brazelton, Marion, 238
Brazelton, Max, 287
Brehme, Walter, 284
Brinck, Mary Dolan (Mrs. William), 86
Brinck, William, 86
Brinkerhoff, Isaac, 81, 83
Brisbee, Cliff, 304
Bristow, Prof., 83
Bristow, Samuel D., 157
Brown, Beriah, 79–80
Brown, Roy E., 300
Bryon, William, 206
Buchanan, President James, 40
Buck, Anna M. (Mrs. Leonard W.), 55
Buck, Emma, 96
Buck, Frank H., 106–7, 114, 126, 159, 170, 171, 174, 300
Buck, Frank H., Jr., 238, 241, 244, 249, 252, 253, 254, 256, 270, 277, 282
Buck, I.K., 155
Buck, Leonard W., 55, 59, 63, 96, 113–14, 122, 125, 146, 154, 179
Buckbee, Rev. C.A., 83
Buckingham, Elise P., 105, 119–20, 125, 188, 194
Buckingham, Thomas H., Jr., 120, 125–26, 160
Budd, James H., 179
Burbank, Luther, 118
Burns, John, 207
Burris, Rev., 93
Burton, Elmer, 217
Burton, James H., 117–18
Burton, Richard E., 117–18
Butcher, "Uncle Billy," 168
Butcher, William, 57, 73, 192
Butters, H.A., 149

C

Cantelow, William, 52–53, 54, 59, 74
Carroll, William J., 300, 301
Caughy, James, Jr., 290
Chancellor, A.T., 300
Chandler, Frederick B., 153, 282
Chandler, Harry, 153, 223
Chandler, Lloyd, 223
Chinn, R.H., 120–21, 170
Chubb, Charles M., 118
Clark, William J., 231
Coates, Rev. M.W., 228
Coats, Rev. A.C., 228
Cobble, Roy J., 300
Coffer, Richard, 299
Cole, William B., 68
Coleman, Roy, 87, 135
Collier, A.A., 270
Collins, J.B., 58, 59
Conley, J., 59
Cook, Sherburne F., 8, 15
Coombs, Rose Peña, 306
Corn, Daniel K., 67, 126, 143, 153, 156, 167, 175, 300
Costello, Robert, 264
Cowan, Rev. E.C., 88
Cox, Edward J., 225, 226–27
Cox, E.F., 259, 300
Coxey, Jacob, 133
Cruses, José, 230–31
Crystal, E.C., 252
Crystal, George W., 158, 159
Cunningham, Dr., 67
Curtice, Merle, 304
Cutler, Milton, 69

D

Davidson, H.G., 42
Davidson, Rev. James A., 91
Davis, George W., 194
Davis, Hellen, 194, 257
Davis, Mattie (Mrs. George W.), 194
Davis, William B., 69, 159
Day, Bernard J., 265
Decker, I.L., 57
Decker, Solomon, 38, 63
Denton, Rev. J.E., 208
DeWitt, Gen., 268
Dietz, Arthur, 301
DiGiorgio, Joseph, 126, 241
Dito, Rudolph, 264
Dobbins, Brantley W., 230
Dobbins, Jeff, 207
Dobbins, O.P., 45
Dobbins, R.D., 59
Dobbins, S.P., 300
Dobbins, Judge Sinclair M., 61, 259
Dobbins, Dr. William J., 35, 56, 57, 73, 81, 94, 100, 131, 167, 169
Dodge, Ossian E., 84
Dolan, John, 57, 59
Dolan, John, Jr., 57
Dollarhide, David, 35
Dollarhide, Evan, 35
Donaldson, Joshua, 69, 100
Donoho, W.C., 168
Donoho, Mrs. W.C., 203
Doughty, John, 41
Downey, Sen. Sheridan, 252, 288
Dozier, Melville, 149
Dudley, J.M., 42
Dunn, Patrick H., 100
Dunn, William A., 35
Durán, Fr. Narciso, 10, 15
Dutton, David, 46, 73, 85, 88, 156, 159
Dwyer, William, 57
Dykes, Milton, 284
Dykes, Truman, 284

E

Eldredge, Esther Sharpe, 270
Elliott, M.E., 203
English, Judge James R., 115
Escano, Manuel, 141
Escano, Manuel, Jr., 141
Esquivel, Antonio M., 73, 94
Evans, Morris, 77

F

Fadley, Clyde, 250, 301
Fadley, Vera (Mrs. Clyde), 250, 301
Fisher, Edward, 225
Fisher, Henry I., 161
Fisk, John, 35

Fitzgerald, Rev. Oscar P., 77, 78, 79, 93
Folger, Capt. Mayhew, 120
Foote, Richard, 196
Fore, W., 42
Forster, Rev. C.H., 228
Foster, Charles L., 134–35
Fraser, J.P. Munro, 38
Freitas, John, 291
Fruhling, Rev. A.C., 188, 228, 230, 255, 260
Fulmor, James, 288

G

Garlichs, Oscar, 155
Garrison, Mrs. A., 165
Gate, James, 96
Gates, Carl, 45
Gates, Jefferson A., 98
Gates, J.W., 59, 63
Gates, Monte, 287
Gates, Theodore, 35
Geddes, Samuel R., 290
Giannini, Amadeo P., 224–25, 115
Gibbs, W.R., 58
Gillespie, Edgar F., 32, 33, 35, 38
Gillespie, George A., 32, 33, 42
Gilley, Etheal, 301
Glines, Kenneth, 294
Gober, W.R., 77
Godfrey, W.S., 197
Goepfert, Enos, 157, 230
Goheen, William, 304
Gonzales, Frank, 287
Gorden, R., 66
Gordon, David, 205–6
Gould, George, 149
Graham, Walter V., 300
Grannen, Corinne L., 301
Gray, Francis M., 177, 191
Gray, Rolla, 253, 300
Greene, Thomas W., 83
Gregory, Dr. Uriah, 83
Grey, Robert U., 98
Griffith, C.C., 218

H

Hacke, F.H., 170
Hada, T., 138
Harbison, Hester (Mrs. Luther J.), 220, 283
Harbison, Luther J., 220, 283
Harding, Dr., 67
Harriman, E.H., 146
Hartley, Clement M., 115, 126, 140, 159, 225, 226, 238
Hartley, Clement M., Jr., 241, 242, 253, 284, 300
Hartzell, Col. J.W., 148–49
Hassing, Berton, 301
Hatch, A.T., 122
Hawkins, Arculus C., 69, 73, 88, 129, 184–85, 186
Hawkins, Chauncey, 186–87
Hawkins, Robert B., 284
Hayashi, Huishi, 268, 269
Hayward, W., 84
Heinemann, Alexander, 189
Hewitt, Joseph W., 93
Hewitt, Trent, 155
Hilden, Adele, 286
Hilden, Alice, 286
Hilden, Elmer J. ("Whitey"), 213
Hilden, Roy, 286
Hill, Harry G., 75
Hill, J. Wesley, 100
Hill, Ruth T., 201
Hill, William S., 169
Hinkley, J.C., 41
Hollingsworth, John, 35
Hooton, William J., 35, 38
Hoover, President Herbert, 249
Hough, D.E., 62
Hubbard, Dr. J.M., 59, 94
Huckins, John, 59
Hughes, Bert, 301
Hughes, Warren, 293
Huland, William, 95
Hume, Jack, 272, 273, 274, 291
Hume, William M., 272, 273
Huntington, Arabella (Mrs. Collis P.), 146
Huntington, Collis P., 144, 146, 147
Huntington, Henry E., 146, 149

I

Ichimoto, Frank ("Flash"), 267
Irish, Col. John P., 141
Irwin, Will, 139
Irwin, Gov. William, 94
Isabella, Dom, 270

J

Janes, Jeptha, 96
Jeans, Thomas J., 69
Jenney, Dr. W.C., 198
Jepson, Willis L., 200–201
Johnson, Hiram, 127, 178, 194
Johnson, Rep. Leroy, 288
Johnson, President Lyndon, 253
Jones, Barbara J., 300, 301
Jones, Rev. J.P., 88

K

Kagee, John, 93
Kearny, Dennis, 131
Keller, Fr., 230
Killingsworth, Wiley S., 179–81, 217, 300
Klotz, Al, 217
Koford, Hugh, 264
Korns, Levi, 56, 57

L

Ladd, Elizabeth Folger (Mrs. James D.), 120
Ladd, James D., 120
Laine, Tom, 41
Lassen, Peter, 156
Libonati, Lt. Michael L., Jr., 265
Lincoln, President Abraham, 40, 41, 79, 80
Long, Clay, 25, 33, 35
Long, Garrard, 35
Long, J.P., 25, 33
Long, Minnie, 45, 46
Long, P., 35
Long, R., 57
Long, Richard, 58, 121
Long, Richardson, 35, 91, 100
Long, Southey W., 35, 45
Long, W., 57
Long, William B., 45, 46
Long, Willis, 25, 33, 35
Longmire, Joseph, 35
Loomis, Rev. Henry, 62
LoPolito, Jane, 301
Lorenzo, Betty, 301
Lucchesi family, 218
Lucky, Laura E., 78
Lucky, Mary C., 78
Lucky, Rev. William T., 77, 78, 80–81, 90
Lum, Sam, 219
Lyon, Albert, 25, 26, 33
Lyon, Anita, 218
Lyon, John P., 121
Lyon, María Dolores Peña, 218, 304
Lyon, Nestora, 197, 218

M

McBride, John A., 296, 297
McClain, James D., 144–45, 160, 161, 165, 166, 206, 235
McClellan, Gen. George B., 40
McCready, David, 246, 264, 277
McCrory, James R., 225, 271
McCune, Delmar, 276
McCune, Henry E., 38, 39, 81, 88
McDaniel, William, 1, 27, 33, 35, 65, 99
McGeary, Edward, 35, 45
McGuire, James, 35
MacIntyre, Margaret ("Daisy") Steiger, 157
McKenna, Joseph, 204
McKevitt, Alexander, 54, 57, 113
McKevitt, Frank B., 112–13, 126, 138, 300
McKevitt, Frank B., Jr., 112–13, 199, 241, 242, 269 270
McKevitt, Leila Lindley (Mrs. Frank B., Jr.), 199–200, 222, 250, 279, 291
McLain, William, 193
McMahon, Samuel Green, 35, 46, 54
Manuel, Joe, 217
Markham, Charles Edward Anson (Edwin Markham), 47, 75–76, 89, 284
Markham, Elizabeth, 89
Martell, Charles, 59
Martin, Frances, 141
Martin, T.B., 170
Martinez, George, 264
Matsuoka, T., 138
Maupin, Thomas, 98
Mellinger, Rev. W.L., 197
Merchant, J.B., 88, 95
Merchant, Ralph, 95
Merryfield, J.C., 81, 82
Methvin, Audrey, 306
Methvin, Nancy, 306
Meyers, Otto, 296
Micheltorena, Gov. Manuel, 20
Mikalis, Ron, 297
Miller, George, 208
Miller, James M., 154–55, 189
Miller, Jessie Saxton (Mrs. James M.), 184, 189
Miller, Meredith R., 32, 50, 51–52, 54, 58, 59, 63, 69, 96, 100, 153
Miramontes, Ignacio, 16
Mix, John, 135, 145
Mizner, Lansing B., 26, 27, 33, 65, 99
Moraga, Lt. Gabriel, 12
Moriel, Lola, 141
Morrell, A.S., 83
Morton, Hank, 94
Morton, Thomas H., 98
Morvillios. Mme. Fay, 197
Mowers, Delbert, 258, 274, 304
Mundy, Carroll, 266, 271, 296
Murdock, Victor, 197

N

Nakatani, Terry, 269
Nakatani, Yoshio, 284
Nay, Fred L., 217, 270
Nelson, Eleanor, 269
Nelson, Maude, 192
Nishioka, Harry, 268
Nishioka, Mrs. Harry, 268
Nofuentes, Dolores Espinal Espinosa (Mrs. Manuel), 140
Nofuentes, Manuel ("Frankie") 140
Nom Kee, 131

O

O'Donnell, Judge W.J., 259
Oiler, J.M., 192
Ordaz, Fr. Blas, 13

P

Padan, E.H., 267
Palmer, Dr. H.P., 175
Pardee, Gov., 180
Pardick, J.B., 272, 273
Parke, Robert, 59, 60, 62
Parker, Carlton H., 116
Parker, Challen, 116–17
Parker, W.B., Jr., 300
Parker, William B., 115–16, 159, 169, 179
Parks, J.G., 35
Patterson, Ellis, 260
Patton, John, 25, 26, 33
Patton, John, Jr., 26
Paul, Jeffrey, 306
Pellegrini, Clara, 306
Peña, Andrea, 304
Peña, Antonio, 304
Peña, Clara, 304
Peña family, 302–3
Peña, Galvino, 304

Peña, Isabella Gonsalves (Sra. Juan F.), 18, 99
Peña, Jesús, 101, 304
Peña, John, 192
Peña, José Demetrio, 57, 73, 99, 101, 304
Peña, Juan Felipe, 5, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 24, 34, 65, 99, 304, 306
Peña, Juanita, 304
Peña, Luciana (Mrs. Jesús), 304
Peña, Narcissa, 304
Peña, Thomas, 304
Pepper, J.M., 57
Pico, Gov. Pío, 20
Pierpont, Frank, 162
Pierson, Louis, 59
Pierson, Margaret (Mrs. Louis), 59
Pippo, Paul, 115
Plaisted, G.W., 59
Platt, Frank, 156, 157
Platt, George N., 156
Platt, Judge Ralph H., 156, 157–58, 230–31
Pleasants, Alice, 86
Pleasants, J.M., 31, 33, 50, 58, 100
Pleasants, William J., 31, 33, 50, 58, 86
Poiser, J., 59
Porter, Albert, 300
Posey, Dick, 197
Power, Edwin I. ("Bunny"), 220, 222
Power, Helen Harbison (Mrs. Edwin I.), 220, 222, 283
Power, Robert H., 222, 264, 283
Powers, Stephen, 8, 21
Pritchett, Frank, 301
Putnam, Ansel W., 57
Pyle, Harry ("Cat"), 156

R

Rago, Frank, 115, 265
Rago, James (Jimmy Reagan), 194
Reading, Christina, 306
Reid, R.L., 155
Rico, John, 287
Riehl, Ed, 111
Riehl, Rudolph, 111
Ritchie, Archibald A., 16
Rivas, Lupe, 141
Rivera, Jesús Tapia, 304
Rivera, Nestora Peña (Sra. Jesús Tapia), 18, 99, 101, 304
Robbins, Reuel D., 117, 159
Roberts, Thomas, 45
Robinson, J.B., 184
Robinson, J.M., 58, 59
Robinson, Roger T., 272
Rogers, Alleyne, 225
Rogers, Henry, 287
Rogers, Howard, 242, 250
Rogers, J.N., 117, 238
Rogers, James H., 236
Roosevelt, President Franklin D., 249, 265
Rossi, George, 230
Roulund, Dean, 264
Roulund, L.W., 264
Roulund, Mrs. L.W., 264
Routier, Joseph, 104
Rowland, John, 17
Rulofson, Rodney, 306
Rust, E., 58
Ryhiner, Theodore, 94, 95, 140, 195

S

Sackett, B.R., 50
Salazar, Florence, 306
Sánchez, Sgt. José Antonio, 12
Sanchez, Mary, 141
Saxton, Jesse B., 184, 189
Schaefer, Walter, 252, 277
Schroeder, Elmer H., 288
Schroeder, H.A., 59
Schultz, Alvin K., 277
Scoggins, Green, 98
Sears, Albert, 161
Semple, Robert, 25
Sharpe, George, 182, 185, 190, 227, 270, 300
Sharpe, Millard, 63
Shattuck, P.O., 77
Silvey, E.S., 42
Simmons, Rev. J.C., 77, 81
Skelton,W., 96
Smith, Al, 249
Smith, J.L., 93
Smith, James J., 290
Smith, Maude E., 204
Smith, W.W., 59, 63, 118, 204
Solano, Chief Francisco, 16
Sperinde, Louise, 306
Stadtfeld, Joseph, 164, 165, 193, 254–55, 259
Stanford, Leland, 144, 147
Stark, J.V., 59
Steiger, A., 59
Steiger, Frank A., 157, 174–75, 177, 189, 214
Steiger, Katherine Saxton (Mrs. Frank A.), 154, 184, 189
Steiger, Margaret, 158, 189
Steindorff, Paul, 189
Stettinius, Edward R., 274
Stevens, Elder B.A., 88
Stevenson, A.M., 35, 45, 46, 70, 73, 81, 143
Stevenson, Charles H., 96
Stevenson, Ella Dutton (Mrs. William T.), 86
Stevenson, G.B., 35, 46, 69, 73, 85, 87, 143
Stevenson, William T., 86
Stewart, Rev. J.C., 77
Stilson, Prof., 184
Stitt, Eliza, 110
Stitt, Dr. J.W., 194, 197, 198
Stitt, R.B., 161
Strong, W.L., 300
Sullivan, John L., 193
Sweeney, John N., 206
Syar, C.M., 291

T

Taft, S.A., 83
Tanaka, Rev. H., 138
Tate, Neat M., 201, 222, 238, 266
Tate, Mrs. Neat M., 266
Teraura, Tomio, 269
Terrill, Dr., 197
Thissell, George W., 32, 58, 63, 204
Thissell, George W., Jr., 86
Thomas, Rev. J.R., 77
Thompson, Douglas, 292
Thompson, Frank, 240, 254, 256
Thompson, Mrs. Mannie, 265
Thompson, Richard, 69
Thompson, Simpson, 55
Thompson, Walter S., 180
Thompson, William, 55
Thornton, Jack, 231, 256
Thurber, Edward R., 51, 58, 59, 69, 74, 85, 159, 225, 242, 250
Tilson, J.D., 67, 70
Tilson, J.R., 88
Towson, Mary E. (Mrs. William B.), 35
Towson, William B., 34, 35
Travis, Robert F., 275
Trippe, W.W., 234
Turner, George, 242
Turpin, Ben, 197

U

Uhl, Clarence J., 125, 126, 160, 179, 180–81, 238, 239, 256, 266, 300
Uhl, Edwin H., 239, 253, 254, 256, 273, 287, 288, 294

V

Vaca, Appolonia, 18
Vaca, Cecil, 305
Vaca, Clara, 305
Vaca family, 302–3
Vaca, Faustina ("Chris"), 305
Vaca, Florence, 305
Vaca, Florentine, 109
Vaca, Jacinto, 305, 306
Vaca, John, 305
Vaca, Juan Manuel, viii, 1, 5, 17, 18, 19, 20, 24, 25–26, 64, 65, 99, 306
Vaca, Katherine (Mrs. Jacinto), 305, 306
Vaca, Louise, 305
Vaca, Luis, 96
Vaca, Madalina, 35, 65
Vaca, Manuel, 34
Vaca, Marcos, 34
Vaca, María Dolores Bernal (Sra. Juan M.), 18
Vaca, Mary, 305
Vaca, Nepona, 34
Vaca, Pomocino, 96
Vaca, Prudy, 99
Vaca, Raymunda, 65
Vaca, Tiofilo, 34, 65
Vaile, Louis F., 246
Vaile, Mrs. Louis F., 250
Valencia, Guadalupe, 93
Valencia, Pancha, 93
Vallejo, Gene, 301
Vallejo, Lt. Mariano Guadalupe, 14–15, 16, 17, 19, 20
Vallejo, Platón, 93
Vance, A.W., 67
Vance, R.H., 92
Van Loo, Carolyn, 301
Vivian, Charles, 84
Von Pfister, Capt. E.H., 25

W

Walker, Sidney C., 119, 168
Ward, A.E., 67
Warren, Gov. Earl, 288
Wason, Milton, 39
Webster, Jonathan V., 179
Weihmiller, Christian, 94
Weinstock, Harris, 125
Weir, James C., 88, 184, 185
Weir, Walter W., 243
Wells, Carveth, 197
Werner, Fred, 52
Werner, Rudy, 269, 284, 300
White, Jimmy, 216
White, William Allen, 284
Wickson, Edward, 186
Willard, Frances E., 203
Williams, H.M., 78
Williams, Jeddiah, 98
Wilson, Jay, 21, 33
Wilson, Luzena Stanley (Mrs. Mason), 24, 26–27, 32, 33, 67, 84, 94, 101, 282
Wilson, Mason, 26, 32, 33, 42, 69, 70, 73, 81, 100, 101, 282
Wilson, Thomas, 21, 33
Wilson, Thomas S., 190
Winchell, Amos A., 92
Wolfskill, John R., 17, 21, 33, 35, 50, 51, 55, 58
Wolfskill, Matthew, 33, 35, 54
Wolfskill, Milton, 35
Wolfskill, Susan (Mrs. John R.), 50
Wolfskill, William, 17
Workman, William, 17
Wykoff, Bert, 284, 287
Wykoff, John, 57, 234

Y

Yee Ah Chong, 132
Yee Gim Wo, 132
Yoshihara, Sam, 269
Young, Wood, 18, 100, 242
Yount, George, 51

Z

Zupo, James, 193
Zupo, Mack, 193
Zupo, Tony, 192

Subject Index

A

Accidents, causes of, before 1880, 95–96
Agricultural Workers Industrial Union, 253, 254, 255, 256, 257
Agriculture
  in 1850–1880, 32, 44–50, 73 (**see also** Fresh fruit industry, in 1850–1880)
  in 1880–1940 (**see** Fresh fruit industry, in 1880–1918; Fresh fruit industry, in 1920–1940)
  post–World War II, 284–85
Akerly's Store, 219, 223
Alien land laws, 139, 141
American Fruit Company, 126
American Fruit Growers, 241, 242
American Home Food Products, 283, 285
American Legion, 232
Ancient Order of United Woodmen, 89, 203
Anti-Saloon League, 180, 204, 208–9
Association of Solano Pioneers of California, 100
Atlantic Fruit Distributors, 126
Automobile, introduction of, 213–18

B

Band of Hope, 188, 203
Banking business
  in 1880–1918, 158–60
  in 1920s, 224–27 **see also names of individual banks**
Bank of America, 159, 189, 226, 242
Bank of Italy, 115, 224–27
Bank of Vacaville, 115, 158–59, 224, 225, 227
Baptist Church, 87, 88, 184, 228, 230. **See also** California College
Baseball, 86, 191, 192–93, 232
Basic Vegetable Products Company, 272–75, 283
Blum, J. & I. (firm), 156
Boosters Club, 212, 213
Bowles Opera House, 119, 172
Boxing, 193–94
Boy Scouts, 188
Buck, Frank H., Company, 106–7, 114, 122, 123, 125, 126, 238, 240, 241, 242, 254
Buddhist Temple, 137, 138, 267, 269
Business growth
  in 1850–1880, 65–67, 68
  in 1880–1918, 152–53, 154–56, 157, 158–62
  in 1920s, 217–27
  in World War II, 272–76, 279
  post–World War II, 282–84

C

California College, 66, 71, 76, 81–83, 88, 182, 203
California Fruit Association of Vacaville, 125
California Fruit Distributors, 126
California Fruit Exchange, 125, 126, 146, 241
California Fruit Growers and Shippers Association, 125
California Fruit Grower's Exchange, 146
California Fruit Union, 122, 125, 146
California Growers' and Shippers' Protective League, 238
California Medical Facility, 281–82
California Normal and Scientific School, 82, 182, 203
California Prune and Apricot Growers' Association, 238
California state officials elected from Vacaville township, 39
Casa Maria, 218–19
Catholic Church, 184, 229, 230
Cattle breeding, 44–45
Census
  of 1850, 33–35
  of 1852, 45, 59
  of 1860, 59, 72, 73
  of 1870, 60, 73
  of 1880, 60, 73
  of 1940, 267
Chautauqua troupes, 197
Chinese community
  in 1850–1880, 57, 59–60, 73
  in 1880–1918, 130–33, 133–34, 166–67, 172, 207, 234
  in 1920s, 230
  in World War II, 278
Chosen Friends, 203
Churches
  in 1850–1880, 87–88
  in 1880–1918, 184–87
  in 1920s, 228–30
  see also names of individual churches
Circuses, 84
Citizens Committee for Civil Betterment, 299
City hall, 299
City planning, post–World War II, 291–93
Civilian Conservation Corps, 243–47
Civil War, 40–41, 79–81
Clark Theater, 231
Coachmen Industries, 283
Communist issue during Depression, 253–58, 259–61
Community Center, 297
Community Chest, 250–51
Congregational Church, 182, 186
Consolidation in 1920s
  of business, 223–27
  of churches, 228–30
  of schools, 227–28
Crime before 1890, 92–94
Cutler, M., and Brother stage line, 68, 69

D

Dairying, 284
Devil's Gate dam, 235–36, 285–89
Diamond Match Company, 153, 158, 223
Disciples of Christ (Christian Church), 76, 87, 88, 162, 184–85, 228, 230
Doshi-Kai Association, 138
Drought, 234, 235–36

E

Earl, E.T., Fruit Co., 104, 113, 122, 125, 126, 180, 241
Earthquake of 1892, 170–71, 187
Education
  in 1850–1880, 74, 76
  in 1880–1918, 180, 181–83
  in 1920s, 227–28
  post–World War II, 294–95
  see also names of individual colleges and schools
Elmira, 104, 113, 216, 256, 287
  decline of, 152, 166
  in Prohibition, 205, 209
  railroad service to, 143, 144
  township of, established, 36, 70, 73
Elm School, 294
Entertainment
  before 1850, 24, 32–33, 94
  in 1850–1880, 83–87, 94
  in 1880–1918, 188–97
  in 1920s, 231–32
Entertainment—cont.
  in World War II, 279
  see also Parks and recreation; Performing arts; Social clubs in 1880–1918; Sports
Episcopal Church, 88, 186

F

Federal aid
  in Depression, 242, 248, 249, 251
  in World War II, 277
Fiesta Days, 297–98, 306
Fire, causes of, before 1880, 94–95, 166
Fire protection
  in 1880–1918, 168, 171–73
  post–World War II, 293–94
Fires, major, 67, 80–81, 166–68, 172–73, 293–94
First National Bank, 159–60, 225–26
Floods, 234–35
Fraternal association
  in 1850–1880, 88–89, 90–91
  in 1880–1918, 187–88
  in 1920s, 231, 232
  see also names of individual associations
Free and Accepted Masons, 88–89, 187–88, 203
Fresh fruit industry
  in 1850–1880, 62–64
    commercial growers in, 50–51, 55–57, 59 (**see also names of individual growers**)
    growing techniques in, 54, 57
    labor in, 57, 59–60, 73
    marketing in, 51–52, 54, 55, 71
    varieties of fruit in, 50–51, 60–62
    winemakers in, 50, 52–54

Fresh fruit industry—cont.
in 1880–1918, 104–7, 127
commercial growers in, 113–16, 117–21 (**see also names of individual growers**)
effect of, on land, 108–9, 110, 112, 234 passim
growing techniques in, 108
labor in (**see** Labor, in 1880–1918)
marketing in, 112–13, 121–27 (**see also** Southern Pacific Railroad, as fruit shippers)
standardization in, 127
in 1920–1940
CCC and, 243–47
conversion of orchards in, 236–37, 247
crop production loans to, 242
dried fruit and, 233, 238–39
drought and irrigation in, 234, 235–36
erosion and flooding in, 234–35, 243, 244, 247
labor in, 253–57, 258–59, 261
marketing in, 233, 236, 238, 239, 240–42
standardization in, 238, 239–40

G

Gambling, 207, 279
Gates and Long's butcher shop, 67, 73
Government. **See** Federal aid; Solano County; Vacaville, town of, government of, post–World War II; Vacaville, town of, incorporation of; Vacaville, township of
Grain cultivation, 45–50, 57
Grape Growers Association, 54
Great Depression, 248
farm labor unionism in, 253–57, 258–59, 261
federal relief in, 242, 248, 249, 251
fresh fruit industry in (**see** Fresh fruit industry, in 1920–1940)
hunger marches in, 257–58
private charity in, 250–51
reform schemes in, 251–53
Gum Moon's Restaurant, 219

H

Ham and Eggs Plan, 252–53
Harbison House, 283
Harms Brothers Investment Co., 291
Harry's Grocery, 267, 268
Hartley Orchard Company, 115
Hawkins Ranch, 129
Hindu labor, 140
Historical preservation, post–World War II, 301–6
Home building
in 1880–1918, 153
in World War II, 277–78
post–World War II, 289–91
Hospitals, first, 197–98, 198–99
Hotel Raleigh, 162, 166, 172, 186, 218
Hotel Vacaville, 219

I

Ichimoto's Pool Room, 267
Improved Order of Redmen, 188
Independent Order of Good Templars, 89, 90–91, 188, 203
Independent Order of Odd Fellows, 88, 187, 188, 203, 207
Indians. **See** Patwin Indians
Irrigation. **See** Devil's Gate dam; Drought

J

Japanese American Citizens League, 267
Japanese Association, 138, 267
Japanese church on Boyd Street, 138
Japanese community, 192
in 1880–1918, 136–40, 141, 178, 236
in World War II, 266–70, 279

K

Knights of Pythias, 188, 203
Kopp's Bakery, 198

L

Labor
in 1850–1880, 57, 59–60, 73
in 1880–1918
Chinese, 130–33, 133–34, 136
Hindu, 140
Japanese, 136, 139, 140, 141
migrant, 128–29
Spanish, 140–41
unrest among, 133–35
in 1920–1940
Spanish, 230, 253–57, 258–60
unrest among, 253–57, 258–59, 261
Ladies' Improvement Club, 208, 295
Lagunita Rancho, 105, 119–20, 126
Land grants under Mexican government, 15, 16–24. **See also names of individual ranchos**
Law and Order League, 134, 135
Leisure Town, 291
Libaytos, 8, 11, 13, 15, 21
Lihuaytos tract, 17, 19–20
Loring and Bellows's saloon, 92–93
Los Putos Rancho, 1, 20–21
Los Ulpinos Rancho, 20
Lucky Distribution warehouse, 283

M

Malacas, 8, 11, 12, 13, 21
Mansfield and Theodore (merchants), 67
Marketing cooperatives, 122, 125–27, 146
Masonic building, 219, 223
McKenzie and Brown's stage line, 68
Merchants' Association, 213
Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 87–88. **See also** Pacific Methodist College
Mexican government
Indians under, 14–16
lands grants under, 15, 16–24 (**see also names of individual ranchos**)
Miller's Saloon, 206
Mishi's Beauty Shop, 267
Monte Vista Elementary School, 294
Monticello Dam, 285–89

N

National Guard, 180
Nay Garage, 217
Newspaper business in 1880–1918, 160–62
Northern Electric Railroad Co., 149, 150, 151
Nut Tree, 220–22, 282–83

P

Pacific Fruit Exchange, 126, 240, 241, 242
Pacific Gas and Electric Company, 223–24, 283
Pacific Methodist College, 40, 66, 76–81, 82, 90, 93, 203
Parker Ranch, 116, 290
Parks and recreation, 295–98
Patwin Indians
culture of, 5–8
under Mexican government, 14–16
in Putah Creek area, 21–22
under Spanish government, 9–13
see also names of individual groups
Peña Adobe, 20, 280, 304–6
Performing arts
in 1850–1880, 84–85
in 1880–1918, 194–97
in 1920s, 231
Philomathean Society, 85
Pinkham and McKevitt Fruit Company, 113, 126, 199
Pioneer Fruit Company, 122, 126, 241
Population, makeup of
in 1850–1880, 59–60, 72–74
in 1880–1918, 178
in World War II, 267
post–World War II, 263, 280
Portland Cement Company, 140
Presbyterian Church, 87, 88, 184, 185, 203, 228, 230
Prohibition, 208–9, 230–31. **See also** Temperance movement
Prostitution, 206, 279
Public library established, 190–91
Public sector, post–World War II, 281–82. **See also** Travis Air Force Base
Public services
first taxes to undertake, 171
Public services—cont.
see also City planning, post–World War II; Education; Fire protection; Parks and recreation; Roads and sidewalks; Sewage treatment, Water and power
Purity, 223

R

Racing, 86, 194
Radio, introduction of, 222–23
Railroads
before 1869, 68–69
electric interurban, 148–51
see also Southern Pacific Railroad; Vaca Valley Railroad Company; Western Pacific Railroad
Ream's saloon, 168
Red Cross, 139, 198–200, 250, 279
Reid Drug Store, 155
Rico Publishing Company, 283
Río de los Putos Rancho, 17, 20
Roads and sidewalks
in 1880–1918, 164–66, 171
in 1920s, 213–16
Rowland–Workman party, 17–19

S

Safeway, 223
St. Mary's Catholic Church, 229, 230
Saloons, importance of, 169, 205–6, 207. **See also** Temperance movement
San Francisco–Sacramento freeway, 281
Saturday Club, 188–90, 251
Schools. **See** Education; **names of individual schools**

Settlers, early
  Mexican, 15, 16–24
  North American, 25–27
  Spanish, 8–9, 11
Seventh-Day Adventist Church, 88, 186
Sewage treatment, 174–75
Sheep breeding, 45
Social clubs in 1880–1918, 188–90, 251
Social services in 1880–1918, 197–201
Social structure. **See** Churches; Education; Entertainment; Fraternal Associations; Population, makeup of; Social services in 1880–1918; Voting patterns
Solano County
  officials of, elected from Vacaville township, 38–39
  seat of, contested, 41–43
  structure of, 36, 38
Solano County Historical Society, 304
Solano Irrigation District, 284
Southern Pacific Railroad
  antimonopolists and, 146–48, 149
  as fruit shippers, 142, 143–44, 145–46, 147
  hostility toward, 143–45
  passenger service on, 143, 151
  see also Vaca Valley Railroad Company
Spanish community
  in 1880–1918, 140–41
  in 1920–1940, 230, 253–57, 258–60
Spanish government
  colonization under, 8–9, 11
  Indians under, 9–13
Spanish Society, 141, 253, 259
Sports
  in 1850–1880, 86
  in 1880–1918, 191–94
  in 1920s, 231, 232
Sprouse–Reitz, 223
Standard Oil regional distribution center, 217
Strand (Grand) Theater, 197
Suisun, Rancho, 16, 17, 20
Suisunes, 8, 11, 12, 13, 15, 16
Sunnydale Farm, 58, 86

T

Temperance movement, 89–92, 180–81, 188, 202–9
  See also Prohibition
T–K Barber Shop, 267
Tolenas, 8, 11, 13
Tolenas, Rancho, 16, 20
Town hall, old, 175, 301
Townsend Plan, 251, 252
Travis Air Force Base, 272, 275–76, 281, 294
Triangle Building, 292

U

Ulatis Book Club, 190
Ulatis Club, 188
Ulatis Park, 278
Ulatis School, 181, 182, 183, 227, 294, 296
Ulatus Academy, 65, 76, 88, 190
Ululatos, 8, 11, 13, 15, 21
United Prune Growers, 242
USO, 279

V

Vaca family reunion (1978), 306
Vaca High School, 294, 295
Vaca Valley Acres, 277
Vaca Valley area
  climate of, 3
  terrain in, 2–3, 30
  vegetation in, 3, 4, 110–12
  wildlife in, 4, 31, 109–10
Vaca Valley Creamery, 284
Vaca Valley Driving Association, 194
Vaca Valley Railroad Company, 66, 68, 95, 96
  after 1877, 143 (**see also** Southern Pacific Railroad)
  founded, 69–71, 98
Vaca Valley Village, 290
Vacaville, town of
  government of
    post–World War II, 298–301
    see also Vacaville, town of, incorporation of
  growth of
    in 1850–1880, 64–67, 68, 98, 152
    in 1880–1918, 152–56, 158–62 (**see also** Vacaville, town of, incorporation of)
    in World War II, 272–79
    post–World War II, 280–98
    see also Business growth; Home building; Public sector, post–World War II; Public services; Water and power
  historical preservation of, 301–6
  incorporation of, 163
    approved, 171
    civic building follows, 175–77
    fire danger and, 166–68
    opposition to, 169–70
    public services follow, 171–75
Vacaville, township of, 36–38, 65–66
  voting patterns in, 39–41
Vacaville and Winters Fruit Company, 113
Vacaville Arion Club, 85
Vacaville Athletic Club, 193
Vacaville Brass Band, 84
Vacaville Chamber of Commerce, 213
Vacaville Community Church, 228, 230, 231
Vacaville Drug Company, 154–55
Vacaville Exchange Club, 213
Vacaville Fruit Company, 115, 126, 241
Vacaville Fruit Growers Association, 125, 126 133, 226, 239, 241, 274
Vacaville Garage Company, 216, 217
Vacaville Heritage Council, 250, 301
Vacaville Inn, 218
Vacaville Land Agency, 155
Vacaville Oil Company, 162
Vacaville Riots, 253–57, 258–59
Vacaville Sportsmen's Club, 191
Vacaville Thespian Club, 85
Vacaville Urban Renewal Agency, 292
Vacaville Water and Light Company, 119, 169, 170, 173, 223
Vacaville Women's Star Club, 188
Vallejo and Northern Railway, 149, 150
Vallejo Society of California Pioneers, 100
VESCO, 223–23
Voting patterns
  in 1850–1880, 39–41
  in 1880–1918, 178–81, 204, 209
  in 1920–1940, 249, 252, 253

W

Water and power
  initiation of, 170, 173–74
  post–World War II, 285–89
  see also Pacific Gas and Electric Company; Vacaville Water and Light Company; Yuba Electric Power Company
Western Pacific Railroad, 151
Winemakers, 50, 52–54
Wintuns, 5, 8
Women's Christian Temperance Union, 188, 190, 202–3
Women's Crusade, 202
Women's Improvement Club, 188
Woodmen of the World, 188
World War II
  business growth during, 272–76, 279
  citizens serving in, 264–65
  civil defense efforts during, 265–66
  housing shortage during, 276–78
  Japanese interned during, 266–70, 279
  rationing during, 270–72
  social changes during, 279

Y

Youth Center, 296
Yuba Electric Power Company, 173

VACAVILLE

THE HERITAGE OF A CALIFORNIA COMMUNIT

VACAVILLE

Jim Baugh and Payne

VACAVILLE
CITY
COUNCIL

VACAVILLE

THE HERITAGE OF A CALIFORNIA COMMUNITY

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Vacaville is now a bustling, modern city of over 38,000 people. Today only a few orchards survive as reminders that the town was the fresh fruit capital of California during its golden age between the 1880s and the 1920s. But the town's origins go back to the Patwin Indians who inhabited the surrounding hills and valleys for centuries before the coming of the Europeans in the early 1800s. Next the New Mexican pioneers came over the Old Spanish Trail, bringing cattle and horses for their ranchos and vines and plants for their fields. They named many of the places where they settled. American stock raisers and farmers began to arrive in the 1840s and already dominated the region by 1851 when the town of Vacaville was founded. As fruit culture reached its peak there was an influx of Chinese and Japanese settlers.

This book is a bicentennial project sponsored by the City of Vacaville and made possible by the widespread cooperation of groups and individuals of the town and surrounding communities. It is a five-part narrative, richly illustrated, that emphasizes the people and their impact on the development of the land as well as the changing societies that they established in pursuit of their goals. The story follows the development of the city and its surrounding area from the indigenous beginnings through the eras of the rancho, the farm, and the fruit culture, down to the present concerns of the commuter population that began to settle in the city during World War II and continues to grow at the present time.

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